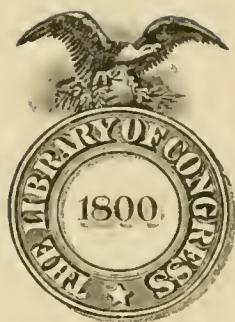


JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY



AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Class F 547

Book S 677



Jasper L. Douthett

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

The Autobiography of a Pioneer

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JENKIN LLOYD JONES



BOSTON
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION
25 BEACON STREET

F547

S6D7

1992/2

05

21

AFFECTIONATELY *inscribed to relatives and friends, on earth and in heaven, who have been faithful co-workers in the mission of my life; most of all to her who was my constant companion, chief inspiration, oracle and guide for nearly fifty years, and to our four children, each of whom, from childhood to this day, has had a mind and heart to lend a hand.*

FOREWORD

THIS little book is the simple story of the ministry of my dear brother Jasper through many years to his own people in his own home land. It is what a little maid in a far away old time used to ask for,—“a truly story” to the last line, and well I can testify that the half has not been told. But what he tells me goes right to the heart, as it will go to the hearts of the thousands who will read it, of our faith and name, and the “Lend a Hand Society,” of which we are all members in the wider interpretation of the happy thought that “joins hands and leaves nobody out.”

Robert Callger

INTRODUCTION

THE story of Jasper L. Douthit, as told by himself in these pages, is the story of a hard life, spent amid surroundings always simple, sometimes rude and rough, but it is the story of a life singularly devoted to high things, and such a story can never be wholly sad. This life was shot through and through with consecration, with devoutness, with an altruistic passion to uplift the particular section of God's earth into which he was born, and to serve the people to whom he was related. The story is necessarily inadequately told, for no man can justly estimate his own life or properly tell his own story, least of all a man of Mr. Douthit's intense temperament, whose seriousness has never been sufficiently relieved by a sense of humor or freedom from care and the occasional recoil from labor which gives the imagination a chance to put in its shadings or to cushion the ragged rocks with moss and decorate the beetling cliffs with vines and flowers.

INTRODUCTION

We have here a photograph and not a painting. Here is a realism that may mar the literary attractiveness of the picture, but which greatly enhances its value as the material out of which true history must eventually be written. Mr. Douthit appears in these pages as a chronicler rather than as an historian. He has given us a collection of facts which, superficially studied, may seem trifling and sometimes gruesome, but deeper study will disclose their value as it will reveal high joys and noble convictions.

We have here a cross-section of a pioneer life whose part in the development of the Mississippi valley has never been adequately stated. The streams of immigration from over New England and over the sea — English, Celtic, Scandinavian, German, French, etc. — have been studied with such interest and with the help of such abundant material as to overshadow that other stream which poured out of Virginia and the Carolinas through Tennessee and Kentucky into southern Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. Douthit, the people to whom he belongs, and the counties to whose service he has given his life, belong to this stream. He is necessarily a "mountain man." In temper, origin and environment as well as in appearance, he belongs

INTRODUCTION

to the tribe of Abraham Lincoln. The hard drinking, the fiery theology, the vehement prejudices, the bitter quarrels, the deadly feuds and withal, the robust intellects and stalwart consciences which figure in this tale find their counterpart and explanation in the south and the southeastward.

Mr. Douthit was a "home missionary," but he expounded a foreign gospel. "About the last place on earth one would expect to find or try to plant a Unitarian church," was the common remark of his friends. Unitarianism was never put to a severer test than when Jasper Douthit sought with it to ameliorate the severities and remove the illiteracy and iniquities of southern Illinois in the sixties and the seventies. Channing's interpretation of the gospel in terms of gentleness and love, Theodore Parker's interpretation of Christianity in terms of justice and freedom to the slave, and Emerson's rendering of the universe in terms of order, progress and peace, were by Douthit set over against Calvinism in its most dogmatic form, the whiskey jug with its fiery contents, and the shot gun with its maximum of civic potency and political prowess, and the sequel shows that these higher interpretations of religion were tried and not found

INTRODUCTION

wanting. This story of the missionary work done by Jasper Douthit in Shelby county, Illinois, is a triumphant justification of the claim that the gospel of love is more than a match for the gospel of hate, and that a reasonable religion is better adapted to the needs of all classes and conditions of men than the religion of dogmatism and the unreasoning faith of bigotry.

Notwithstanding Mr. Douthit's attempt to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about his mission, to anyone conversant with the facts in the case these pages give an inadequate account of the work accomplished by this tireless missionary and his gentle, dreamy-eyed and shrinking but never faltering wife. The facts that can be put into figures — the churches built, the Sunday-schools maintained, the church members enrolled, the ministers, four or more, who have found their work in and through Mr. Douthit's mission, are such as to challenge admiration, perhaps to defy competition among his fellow ministers. But the tangible facts, those that evade an accounting — his part in modifying the harshness, ameliorating the bigotry, dissipating the illiteracy, improving the quality of the schools and refining and humanizing the village, city and

INTRODUCTION

country life throughout a wide area, represent the highest achievements of this missionary in "Egypt." It is not going too far afield to discover some strains of the humanitarian faith preached by Jasper Douthit, represented by the better fences, the more passable roads, the safer bridges, the flowers in the front yards, the well dressed and well kempt children sitting in up-to-date school houses and receiving efficient tuition from competent teachers in the countryside traversed by him for over forty-five years.

When Mr. Douthit comes to Chicago there is a parish meeting of his own ready to greet him, and the present writer has heard his name pronounced with love and affection beyond the farthest ranges of the Rockies by those who have been strengthened by him in times of sorrow, who perchance have plighted marriage vows in his presence, or who have brought their children to receive baptismal blessings at his hands.

The Lithia Springs Chautauqua, situated in its ample and splendid forest, with its annually increasing throng of happy, gentle, appreciative men, women and children, drawn from Douthit's territory, for his bailiwick is a wide one, is a fitting and eloquent witness to the

INTRODUCTION

effectiveness of his work. The Unitarian friends who through the American Unitarian Association and other channels have made this work possible through all these years, can find no higher use for their money than to continue their support, with increasing confidence and generosity, of this great inter-denominational and cross-party conference that tells so mightily for personal purity, civic righteousness, and the spiritual life.

I have used the word "sad" in connection with the life of my friend Jasper Douthit. Like all sensitive souls, he has a great capacity for suffering. As will be seen, he has ever been torn by his ideals; his spirit has been often fretted by the great chasm between the things he would and the things he could do. But Brother Douthit's power of enjoyment is also great, and I regret that he has not been able to put in the sunshine which made the shadows in the picture possible. But what artist can?

My acquaintance with Mr. Douthit began in the student days at Meadville. My first visit to his home was while he still lived on the old homestead in the log house with a frame enlargement, necessitated by the increasing family. This home at that day could be reached only

INTRODUCTION

on horseback ; it was a voyage by water and not a journey by land, so profound were the muddy depths between the dreary little station and the lonely little cabin. I have been in close touch with him and his work throughout the forty or more years of our acquaintance. I think I opened the campaign in Shelbyville, preaching the first sermon in the old court-house that led to the establishment of his church. I think I know the man and the temper of his spirit. Before the occasion comes, Douthit is often cast down ; after the occasion passes, he is often torn with disappointment and humiliation ; but he ever rises to the occasion and his uttered words are charged with courage, while his message is ever a cheerful one. The sickly, sorrowful looking man, once on the platform or in the pulpit, takes on robustness. His eyes flame, his voice, though often strident and sometimes shrieking, always carries conviction and sympathy and oftentimes enthusiasm.

Mr. Douthit and I have not always agreed. There have been times when I have seriously distressed him ; I probably have believed more in his work at times than he has in mine. On this account I can the more confidently declare the potency of the man, the contagious quality of his

INTRODUCTION

faith. His spirit was larger than his words, though his words represented ever the largest gospel that disturbed his countryside.

I have spoken of the support which his mission has received at the hands of the Unitarians, mostly from the east. Great credit is due those who have held up the hands of this Unitarian missionary whose antecedents, training, manner and method were so un-Unitarian. But in the interest of the next missionary I venture to add that much of the pathos in Douthit's work has been rooted in the carking anxieties as to how the modest needs of the humble home were to be supplied. The support was always enough to keep the light burning on the pulpit, but not enough to make the heart free from kitchen anxieties. The little margin between the "just enough to keep life" and the "enough to make life joyful" as well as loyal was often wanting. Jasper Douthit has never been an extravagant man; his home life and needs were of the simplest kind. If any money slipped through his fingers it was always for "the cause," and still it is sad to think that that small financial distance, the Dickens "six-pence" that made the difference between happiness and misery,

INTRODUCTION

was never quite covered in Douthit's expense book.

It would be interesting to know the aggregate of the money support given to this remarkable ministry during the forty-five or more years of its activity. It would doubtless seem a goodly sum, but compared with the hopes raised, the purposes strengthened, the loves engendered, aye, compared with the sums more lavishly expended on less important and less fertile causes, the sum would indeed be paltry. And certain it is that if the end could have been anticipated from the beginning, if the story, even as inadequately told in this book, had been known before it was enacted, far more willingly would have been added the small percentage of increase which would have made the difference between anxiety and confidence, sleepless nights and grateful sleep.

Take it all in all, I think the readers will be glad that Jasper Douthit has told his own story. They will read it, now with tear-dimmed eyes, and again, perhaps, with an incredulous smile. It is a story which it would be hard to parallel in modern American life for its uniqueness, its historic value, its heroic persistency and its

INTRODUCTION

spiritual suggestiveness. It is the story of an Oberlin of southern Illinois, a rustic Channing of the prairies, a Theodore Parker of the log house, reared in the land of mud and malaria.

JENKIN LLOYD JONES.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I

I was born October 10, 1834, in Shelby County, Illinois, on a farm four and one-half miles east of Shelbyville. My birthplace was at the head of Jordan Creek, named for my mother's father, Francis Jordan, who with his family, were the first white settlers in that vicinity, whither they removed in 1828. The land consists chiefly of flat prairie, with groves of timber bordering the creeks, and the river Okaw, which at its mouth is called the Kaskaskia, flows through the plain. The soil around my birthplace is black, mucky, and very fertile. The roads are so muddy a part of the year as to be almost impassable for wagons. Most of the land was originally set apart by the state as swamp land, considered unfit for cultivation, and was sold for about fifty cents an acre. By drainage it has now become valuable farm land, and is worth one hundred dollars and more per

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

acre. In digging wells, logs several inches in diameter are sometimes found from twenty-five to a hundred feet below the surface. Evidently this country was once covered with water to a great depth. Coal and gas may be found in many places at the depth of a hundred or more feet below the surface. The Lithia mineral springs are in the Okaw River woods, about two and one-half miles from my birthplace. These springs boil from the earth and at intervals emit gas, so that if fire is held close to the water it will burn.

I grew up where I was born and worked on a farm until I was seventeen years old. Here on the family farm rest the bones of my mother and father and grandfather and grandmother Douthit and scores of relatives. By this graveyard is the Jordan Unitarian Chapel, where my brothers and sisters and most of their children and other relatives and neighbors worship. My life has been spent in Shelby County, excepting eighteen months when I was with my parents in Texas, in 1843-1844; part of a year at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana, in 1856; a year in Hillsboro, Ill., in 1858, as Superintendent of Public Schools; a year in Massachusetts, in 1858 and 1859, in the employ

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

of Fowler & Wells at their branch office in Boston, three years at the Meadville School in Pennsylvania, 1864 and 1867, and three months immediately after graduation, in 1867, as pastor of the Unitarian Society in Princeton, Illinois.

My great-grandfather, Evan Douthit, came with his family from Nashville, Tenn., about 1830, and built a log cabin home five miles east of where Jordan Chapel now stands. What interests me about this cabin, which stood until 1896, is the fact that this grandsire and his little Welsh-Irish wife, my great-grandmother, who lived to the age of a hundred and fifteen years and died in Palestine, Texas, were, in those early days, accustomed to walk together five miles through a pathless forest and high prairie grass, to attend religious meetings at a place two miles south of Lithia Springs. This great-grandfather was a "hardshell" Calvinistic Baptist preacher. About two years before I was born, he and his family, with the exception of the oldest son, my grandfather, moved to Texas, then a part of Mexico, and he and his sons were with the army that finally captured Santa Anna and made Texas an independent republic.

My father and grandfather were pioneer

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

farmers and cattle dealers. They drove herds of cattle all the way across the prairie from Shelby County to Chicago, years before there was any road to that small village by Lake Michigan.

Andrew E. Douthit, born in 1814, eldest son of John Douthit, who was the eldest son of Rev. Evan Douthit, was married to Mary Ann Jordan, on August 13, 1833. These were my parents. I am the oldest of a family of six sons and two daughters, one son having died in infancy. Three brothers and two sisters are now living near me and have ever been affectionate co-workers with me. One brother passed to Heaven over thirty years ago, after a brief but brilliant career looking toward the ministry. I cannot think of him as dead, but mightily alive and near me to this day.

My mother's people, as far back as I can learn, were habitual pioneers, ever keeping on the frontier. They came to the territory of Illinois through Tennessee from the South about the year 1804. In that year seven Jordan brothers came from Smith County, Tennessee, to Williamson County, Illinois. When ten years of age, my mother rode behind her father on horseback one hundred and fifty miles to this

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

vicinity. Soon after her marriage all of my mother's people emigrated to Texas. Jordan's Saline, noted on the map of Texas, was founded by my uncle John Jordan. Grandfather Jordan and some others of the family died in Texas, and most of the survivors pushed on to California about the time of Fremont's journey across the mountains to that country. So far as I can ascertain, the Jordans were of Welsh-Irish descent, and the Douthits were Scotch-English and early immigrants to North Carolina.

My mother was born in 1814 in a fort in Franklin County, southern Illinois. The fort was built by her father, Francis Jordan, and his brother Thomas, to protect their families and other pioneer settlers from the Indians. When mother was six years old, being the youngest of a large family of brothers and sisters, her father married for a second wife Mrs. Elizabeth Dement, a widow who also had a large family of children by her first husband. Some of this step-grandmother's children have been noted for public service to the state and country. Her son, Col. John Dement, was a member of the Illinois Legislature with Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas and other celebrities. Col. Dement married the daughter

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

of the famous Governor, also Brigadier General, Dodge, of Iowa, and their son, Hon. Henry D. Dement, served honorably as Secretary of State of Illinois for several years.

My mother, when quite young, had to work hard helping to keep house for her father's large family of children and stepchildren. She had no chance to go to school, but she learned to read and write by herself after the day's work was done. She was very conscientious — morbidly so, perhaps — and extremely sensitive to blame, but her conscience compelled her to speak out plainly for what she believed to be right and against what she believed to be wrong; and for her frankness she was often blamed by those about her. She would weep over this, and yet persist in saying the unwelcome things. Thus when we were in Texas I often heard her denounce slavery and plead for the abused negro, and she would not consent to my father's owning slaves. She felt that she must also say things that were regarded as serious heresies in the old Baptist church; but to all her heretical remarks the sharp sheriffs of the faith would say, "Sister Mary Ann is good and kind-hearted to everybody, she doesn't know any better than

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

to talk that way, and we must overlook her weakness."

My mother's life was for many years one of great trial and sorrow, but she was naturally hopeful and had very vivid religious experiences which gave her comfort and peace amidst the sorest trials. My first memory of her religious experiences made a deep impression upon my life and I will relate it here.

When a small child I was left alone one day to watch her where she had lain for weeks, helpless on a sick bed. It was thought she could not recover. I was suddenly startled by her springing from the bed and exclaiming, "Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!" followed by some other words about hearing a heavenly voice of sweet peace and good cheer. My father, hearing her shouts, came running to the house. I cried out with great alarm, until my mother, with a face that shone out like an angel's, spoke soothingly to me, saying she was so full of joy that she could not help what she did, and that she was going to get well. She did get better, and lived a score of years longer. Her prayer that she might see all her children grown was answered. Not long after that

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

heavenly vision, she was baptized in the Okaw River. A great crowd witnessed the ceremony, and people said they never knew one who appeared so like an angel. Those who knew her love thus to think of her to this day. I think of her too when first her father and all her brothers and sisters had emigrated to what was then the far distant region of Texas. In the night-time I often heard her in her dreams call the names of her loved ones so loudly as to startle me from my sleep. In the daytime when she read a letter from them the tears would flow and she would drive harder at her spinning wheel as if to chase away sorrow, rehearsing the while snatches of those pathetic verses which Cowper puts into the mouth of Selkirk, on the lonely isle of the Pacific:

“ I am out of humanity’s reach;
I must finish my journey alone,
Never hear the sweet music of speech —
I start at the sound of my own.

“ Religion! What treasure untold
Resides in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
Or all that this earth can afford;”

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Being the first grandchild and son of the eldest son of the eldest son in the third generation, my grandparents made much of me — I think they petted me to my hurt in some respects. When I was a little child my grandmother would take me in her lap as she sat in the old handmade hickory chair before the wide open fireplace on winter evenings. She would show me the pictures in the big family Bible and tell me the stories of Joseph and his brethren, and the good Samaritan. I learned more Bible truth from that grandmother than I ever learned from the preachers of my early years. In fact I have thought the good seeds planted in my heart then from the Great Book saved me in after years from despising the Bible when I heard the preachers quote it in support of slavery, liquor-drinking, the horrible doctrine of infant damnation, and the unalterable decree of endless torment for most folks — even the good people that were not of the elect.

That memory of my grandmother, with the open Bible and pictures, and the stories she told me have had more saving power over my life than all the Greek and Latin, the philosophy and theology, or the higher and lower criticism

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

that I learned in adult years, though this later learning was very helpful. I treasure that copy of my grandmother's Bible to-day as a most precious heirloom.

I think it was in the fall of 1843, when I was about nine years old, that my father and grandfather Douthit, with part of their families, went to visit my mother's father's kindred, who had gone to Texas. We went in wagons over rough, dangerous roads, being one month on the journey. There we visited my great-grandfather and great-grandmother Douthit, near Palestine, Texas. Great-grandmother was over one hundred years old then. She was little in body, weighing not more than eighty pounds, but bright in mind and "spry as a cricket," the neighbors said. I can see her now, in memory, skipping out of doors, to pick up chips to cook the family meals in the great open fireplace. Sometimes she sent me. Once when I was loitering for play, my mother called me to hurry up. Just then great-grandfather passed by, leaning upon his staff. He looked at me with rebuking eyes and said: "My boy, if you don't mind your mother, you can never grow to be a good man." I never forgot that rebuke.

I have a most beautiful picture in memory of

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the last time I saw the dear old grandsire. It was at a religious service in the country meeting-house near Palestine. Great-grandfather was the preacher. He was tall and spare, with long hair falling upon his shoulders, and beard, white as snow, reaching far down his breast. His countenance was florid and his eyes piercing; but his body was bent and feeble with nearly ninety years. He trembled with "the palsy," as they called it, so that while he stood to preach there were two stout men to support him, one at each arm. The sermon was very short. I cannot remember the words he spoke, but I caught the spirit of it; and when in after years I read the beautiful legend of St. John the Revelator, in his old age, an exile on the Isle of Patmos, I always thought of the two persons as if they were one picture and had preached to me the same sermon: "Little children, love one another."

My first experience with African slavery was in Texas. I worked with the slaves in the cotton fields and cotton gins, and came to love the negroes, for they were very kind to me. They would gather in their cabins on Sunday and of nights, to hear me read the Bible to them. Then seemed to come to me my first call to preach.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I saw slaves for slightest offenses cruelly beaten by drunken overseers, till blood ran down their bodies to their heels. I took their part, wept aloud at their suffering, and longed to live to help them toward the North Star.

In 1844, as we returned home from Texas on a boat down Red River to New Orleans, there was a beautiful mulatto mother with a bright child on board. My mother had four children then, myself the eldest. We played with the mulatto child and came to love it dearly. I remember how the mother of that child would say to my mother: "I love my children as you do yours, but nobody can tear your children away from you and sell them to different owners as so many cattle. But I have had all of mine but one sold from me and widely separated from each other. Only this little one is left with me. And now they are taking me and it to sell at auction in New Orleans."

Then she would weep bitterly and my mother would weep with her. Finally, as our boat approached the wharf in New Orleans, that slave mother with her child in her arms went overboard, and in spite of all attempts to prevent, they sank forever. It was thus that distressed mother sought to escape from the hell of slavery.

II

In body, I am a degenerate son of my foreparents, particularly of the Douthit family. Great-grandfather Douthit was tall and thin, but of wiry muscle. His eldest son, my grandfather, was a giant in strength. He and Col. Davy Crockett, the pioneer congressman and brave soldier, were related, and were near neighbors in eastern Tennessee. Colonel Crockett was famous for physical prowess. It will be remembered that he volunteered to fight for the independence of Texas and he and his company were overwhelmed and all killed in the Alamo. I have heard those say who knew, that my grandfather was the only man in the vicinity of Colonel Crockett's home in eastern Tennessee who could lift equally with him. In clearing up the woodland for cultivation, when a very heavy log was to be lifted and carried to the heap to be burned, John Douthit and David Crockett were the only two that could lift together, one at each end of the handspike held under the big end of the log. My father

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

weighed about two hundred and seventy-five pounds.

I was a puny, crying child, my mother said, and she hardly expected to raise me. I have never weighed more than a hundred and thirty pounds, and am nearly six feet in height. When thirty-five years of age, insurance companies refused to take any risk on my life; and during much of my ministerial life, especially during strenuous periods, I have been horizontal at least one day in the week, on an average, and wholly unfit for any good to anybody. My mother died at fifty-eight, and I did not expect to live beyond that age. But here I am at the age of seventy-three, in better health in some respects than at any time in my life. To be so well and able to keep busy is the surprise of my life and a marvel to those who have known me so long. I ascribe it primarily to the power of spirit over matter. I early learned to believe that the religion of Jesus taught that it is sinful to abuse the body. I came to believe that an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure. Therefore, from early in life, I have totally abstained from intoxicants, narcotics, opiates, and all harmful drugs. I have not in my lifetime spent for



CABIN BUILT IN 1830 BY MR. DOUTHIT'S GREAT-GRANDFATHER



OLD LOG CHURCH, BUILT ABOUT SIXTY YEARS AGO
The hewn logs are now covered with boards

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

myself and my family five dollars for treatment with drugs, and not a dollar that I can remember for patent medicines. My diet for over fifty years has been mostly fruits, cereals and vegetables.

I am convinced that there is nothing that will strengthen a feeble constitution and so conduce to health and long life as to be at peace with the good God and to seek to bless one's neighbors. Alas! the graveyards around me are populous with those of much stronger natural constitutions than I. They died prematurely for lack of knowledge and for want of more vital religion. They became slaves to bad habits in eating, drinking and living.

The first dollar I earned was by pulling "movers'" wagons out of the mud holes with a yoke of oxen. The state road along which emigrants moved passed by my father's home, and in the rainy season the wagons often stuck in the mud. I spent that first dollar for a year's subscription to the *Phrenological Journal*, published by Fowler & Wells, in New York City. That journal taught me the great importance of self-control and of a "sound mind in a sound body." I never spent a dollar in my life that I think resulted in greater benefit to me. It

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

led to information that brought greater good.

I made my start as a public lecturer by speaking on phrenology and kindred subjects. I am aware of the fact that phrenology has been abused by being associated in many minds with "bumpology" and the examining of heads for twenty-five cents each, somewhat as the sublime science of astronomy has been abused by astrology. Nevertheless, the fundamental principles and practical importance of phrenology are now recognized by all who have thoroughly investigated it, including such eminent scientists, statesmen and philanthropists as Spencer, Gladstone, Horace Mann, Dr. Samuel G. Howe, and Henry Ward Beecher. I had the reputation at one time of being an expert in the phrenological delineation of character. I could hypnotize though I never could be hypnotized; but as a lecturer on psychology I became convinced that I was using learned words about a mysterious force that I did not at all understand, and, of course, could not explain — a force that in the hands of the unscrupulous might do much mischief. Therefore I stopped lecturing or demonstrating on the subject; and for the past forty years I have seldom mentioned it publicly. I continue, however, to hold an open

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

mind ready for more light upon psychological questions.

When a boy I was influenced by others to do what I would not have done if I had been told by those I loved and trusted that it was wrong. In fact, I did things I would not have done if I had ever learned that the Bible condemned such acts, because my mother and my grandmother told me that the Bible contained God's word, and I believed them. I well remember when I would have shamefully violated one or more of the Ten Commandments but for the authority of my mother's Bible. This fact convinces me of the danger in arousing doubts about the Bible in the minds of children. It were infinitely wiser and better, first and always, to emphasize the everlasting truths of this Book of books. These truths are mighty to save from sin and error — mighty to create the faith that makes faithful. I have known too many young people led into chronic skepticism and become libertines by being taught that the Bible is full of error and of no authority. Let us welcome biblical criticism, but it should be given wisely at the proper age, and in a reverent spirit, so as to create rather than destroy love for the truth.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

In boyhood my diet was necessarily very simple, mostly corn bread and milk and fruit, and I lived much of the time in the open air as cowboy and plowboy. However, I began life with one dreadfully dangerous habit; namely, the custom of taking a dram of whiskey every morning before breakfast for the sake of health. It was claimed that it would prevent the ague and milk sickness, which in early days were most prevalent and dread diseases in the vicinity of my home. The habit grew, of course, so that we must take a dram before each meal and then one between meals, and still oftener on stormy days and in very cold or very hot weather. In the harvest field we must drink liquor every time we drank water. Once in hay-making, when I was about sixteen years old I drank till I was so tipsy that I talked and behaved very foolishly. When I came to myself, I felt extremely mortified and vowed to God that I would never drink another drop. It was a hard fight to keep that vow. I was ridiculed and laughed at by almost everybody except my mother. They said I was a temperance fanatic, though I hardly knew what that meant. I had never heard a temperance lecture and knew nothing of taking the pledge, but I was ambitious

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

to have good sense and grow manly, and I felt that liquor would spoil me. The vow then made has been kept till this day, excepting that once, years ago, I was tempted by a physician to take a little wine for my stomach's sake, as Paul advised Timothy; but I made haste to repent and have not back-slidden since. My old family doctor, with whom I advised for forty years and who knew the fate of my father, said, "Douthit, I would not prescribe liquor to you for a hundred-acre farm." He knew there was danger of kindling the unquenchable fire that has destroyed so many otherwise happy homes and blasted so many lives.

I had to work early and late, helping mother and father, from the time I was six years old, and without much play, excepting the little time at school where I had nothing to do but say over A B C's three or four times daily and play "bull pen" and "hop scotch" at the noon hour. It was rough frontier life; very rough, my children and grandchildren would think. The only clothes I wore were made by my mother. She spun, wove and sewed them with her own hands. They were made of flax, tow, cotton or wool. When I did not go bare-headed, my cap was home-made of cloth, my hat

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

was made by hand out of wheat straw. I went barefoot, except in winter; and then my father must make the shoes for the whole family, and mine would not get made until very cold weather. Meantime I would have to walk barefoot over the frozen ground, or wade through snow or mud, to feed cattle, sheep and hogs, and haul fire-wood. I must have been ten or twelve years of age when I saw the first pair of boots. They were made by a Pennsylvania Dutchman who moved into the neighborhood. It marked an era in my life when my father got him to make my first boots. It created as much talk to hear of a man in the country who could make boots as it did when the first train of cars came. There was a rush to the boot-maker. He would make promises and fail again and again to keep them, so that I had to go something less than a dozen times before I got my boots. But it was a greater fortune than it would be for me to get a fine horse and buggy now, badly as I sometimes feel the need of them.

The memories of my home for the first ten years of my life are very precious, bright and beautiful. I have in my recollection a blessed picture of our family, after the day of toil, seated around the great open fireplace with the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

old lard lamp on the table or the tallow-dip candle, which was the luxury then for light; with mother knitting or sewing or seated at the little spinning-wheel spinning flax, while father read aloud from David Crockett, Weems's Life of Francis Marion, Robinson Crusoe or the Bible, or sang some good old hymns. If all the memories of that home for years after could have been as lovely and blessed as those of the first few years, it would have been a richer legacy for my father's children than all the wealth of Solomon.

Alas, for the fact that so many once equally happy homes have been ruined and lives embittered by that insidious evil, strong drink! In these early years I often heard my father say: "A man should drink moderately and control himself. Whenever I can't drink without going to excess, I will stop." He was a man of remarkable will-power, but, nevertheless, through the associations of public life and the treating custom, he did get to drinking till he was a terror to his best beloved, and even the officers of the law would flee from him. Then his naturally strong will was destroyed. He was a helpless, miserable victim of that which made him sometimes a raving maniac. And finally,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

as a last resort, to prevent his taking the lives of his family it was necessary to put him under the bonds of public law.

I had an opportunity to know much of the habits of people in this region. My father kept the post-office, called Locust Grove, at our home, five miles east of Shelbyville, over sixty years ago, when the mail was carried on a stage coach from Terre Haute through Charleston, Shelbyville, etc., to Springfield. The Locust Grove precinct election was held for years at our house. My father for much of his life held some office of trust. He was for several years sheriff and ex-officio collector of the county. He collected all the taxes in the county, traveling from township to township to do it. The revenue must be paid in gold and silver, and father hauled it up to Springfield in a two-horse covered wagon. I served part of the time as his deputy, or assistant, and thus became acquainted with many people. The county officers were generous, sociable, pleasant men, and the custom of treating to drinks caused most of them to fall victims to the habit. Thus many men of the most popular qualities were ruined, among them some of my nearest and dearest. For these reasons my first mis-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

sion work was in fighting this evil. In these battles I have received the severest wounds of my life. I have been cursed, libeled and black-mailed again and again, and my life and property have been often in peril.

LIBERTY, UNION, CHARITY, TEMPERANCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS:—These words have ever had a special charm to me since I first caught any of their meaning,—though, like all the great words, they yield a thousand times more meaning the longer the things they stand for are pondered, even as the real America has been extending ever since Columbus sighted a little of its shores. My favorite text was Paul's theme before Felix: "Righteousness, temperance and the judgment to come." I warned of the judgment to come against what to me were the twin evils,—strong drink and African slavery.

Very early, as I have said, the serpent began to crawl through our own home. There was an old still-house near by, and the candidate for office that was most lavish in treating voters to whiskey was usually elected. I have seen kegs of liquor placed at the polling place all day, free as water for everybody, and at night almost every one would be more or less drunk, including the judges and clerks of the election.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

It was the custom sixty years ago here on Christmas and New Year's for neighbors to come together at our house and have what was called a whiskey stew and spree. A big iron kettle or pot (used for making soap and washing clothes) that held eight or ten gallons, was filled with whiskey and other stuff, and made hot and sweetened for men and women, and boys and girls to drink. This was the Christmas or New Year's treat. The decanter of "bitters" stood on the sideboard in many houses, and the preachers who were being entertained drank before and after the sermon. When a small boy, I attended a sort of bar, a grocery store kept by my father where sugar, coffee, etc., and whiskey were sold, and felt honored in the doing until my eyes were opened to the horror of it. A great-hearted man, who was very kind to me and whom I loved when he was sober, became a terror to his family and to everybody. He said he couldn't help it, and so in desperate remorse he resolved to kill himself with drink, and he did.

I see him now as he came to our "grocery" (dramshop) one day with a sled drawn over the snow by a bob-tailed horse, saying that he had come for his last barrel of whiskey. It was

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

loaded on his sled and he got astride and started homeward, saying: "This is my coffin." When he drank till he was so weak he could not help himself to it, the doctor was called and said he must have a little toddy (weakened whiskey) to keep him alive. I sat by him and gave him the toddy in a teaspoon till he breathed his last. I would not obey such medical advice now. I saw many others going down to this death. I saw homes made miserable. I was alarmed, and would tend bar no more.

III

My first hard battle was the struggle for an education. When sixteen years old I had attended a district school only about nine months, and most of that time I was reciting over and over again, four times daily, my A B C's and A-b, Ab's. That was then the foolish method of teaching. I learned to read at home with my mother. The first words she taught me was the title of the family Bible. The first scripture I remember learning was Proverbs, the fourth chapter, and particularly this seventh verse: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding."

My father was an honest man with excellent ability for business, and possessing very popular qualities. He would have been wealthy, but for strong drink. He loved his children and wanted to do his best for them; but he was deeply imbued with Predestinarian Baptist ideas about religion and education.

The Baptist preachers were frequently enter-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

tained at my father's house, and to hear them talk one would suppose they believed that all book knowledge, except of the Bible, and perhaps arithmetic, was of the devil. They seemed to think that if children learned to read, write and cipher so as to do ordinary business, it was sufficient. My father seemed to think that way. When I would beg him to let me go to school, he would say, in the summer time, that maybe I could go when the crop was harvested. Then, after harvest, he would say he could not do without me to help feed and herd stock, for he kept many cattle and hogs. The result was that I could go to school but a few weeks each year. I grew more and more dissatisfied with my ignorance, and lost hope that my father would allow me to get an education. I had read and re-read the few books in our house and had studied far into the nights after working hard all day. About the only books I had to read until I was about sixteen years of age were the Bible, Robinson Crusoe, and the Life of David Crockett, written by himself.

I wanted more books, and used to go into the forest on Sundays, without my parents knowing it, and chop cord-wood to earn money to buy books. I ordered the books from New York

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

City by express. The nearest express office then was Springfield, sixty miles distant. In due time notice came that the books were at the express office. How could I get the box? There was no railroad and no way I knew of to get the package except to send by my father. He was the sheriff of Shelby County, and also collector of all the taxes in the county. The taxes must be paid in gold and silver, and when he had collected a chest full, he put it in a covered wagon, and, accompanied by a guard, with two horses took it to Springfield, the state capital. I asked him to bring my books on one of these trips. He seemed to think there was dangerous heresy in the books, and did not bring them. I felt wronged, and told our hired man so. He thought so too. He was an illiterate fellow who went on spreeds occasionally, but he swore he would help me get the books. I told him I was determined, not only to get the books, but to stay away until I got an education, and he volunteered to give me his wages for that purpose. He gave me three silver dollars to begin with. One Sunday afternoon in springtime I stole away from home, weeping as I went, for I loved home dearly. I walked ten miles to the stage stand on the way to Springfield. Then, hungry

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

and weary, I waited for the stage coach and four horses that carried the mail and passengers across the state via Charleston and Shelbyville to Springfield. It was late at night when the stage coach came along. The passengers quizzed me as to where I came from, whither bound and what for. I frankly told them all. Most of them advised me to go back home to my mother. There was one stout burly man with long black beard, whom I took to be a cattle dealer, who said gruffly to me that I was doing wrong and should go back home. But one good man commended my course and hoped I would be a good boy and make a useful man. We rode all night, arriving in Springfield about daybreak. I got my box of books as soon as the express office was opened and took it into a quiet corner of a store to examine the contents. Besides some books on self-education and the laws of health, there was a phrenological bust by L. N. Fowler. A bald-headed man eyed me curiously as I opened the box, and asked where I came from and what I meant to do. I told him that I had run away from home to get an education. He shook his head ominously and said: "My lad, you better go back to your mother, quicker." Finding no comfort there, I went for

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

a walk on the street and saw a sign of "Book-binding and Store." That was a charming sight, such as I had never before seen. I went in and asked to work for my board and clothes in that store for six months or a year. It seemed a splendid opportunity to get knowledge. The head man took quite an interest in me, and after much close questioning offered to give me a year's schooling if I would bind myself to serve an apprenticeship in book-binding.

I promised to report next day if I decided to accept the proposal. I hesitated to be bound so long a time to a stranger. As I walked, or rather gawked, about the only capital city I had ever seen, I met a little bow-legged man who looked at me curiously and asked if I wanted to hire at work. I told him that I did. He asked if I could drive oxen hitched to a dirt-scraper on the railroad. I told him I thought I could. Then he said he would give me nine dollars a month on trial, if I could begin at once. I agreed to do so because I was almost penniless and wanted to earn my bread and board at least. Then the little man told me the work was to help build the Illinois Central Railroad, near the west line of Shelby County and sixteen miles from Shelbyville. This surprised me. I shrank

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

from going back so near home. However, I felt that I must stick to my contract. The little man promised to bring my box of books, and the next morning just as the sun rose, I started with face toward it, to walk to the place where I was to work, about forty-five miles southeast of Springfield.

About noon I grew weary and faint, and called at a one-room cabin and asked the woman for a drink of water. She waited on me cheerfully, inquired where I was going, and said: "Poor boy, you look as if you were almost starved. Won't you have a glass of milk and a piece of gooseberry pie?"

I replied that I would like it very much, but did not have enough money to pay for it and lodging that night; for I feared I could not reach my journey's end that day.

"Oh!" said the woman, "I don't mean to charge you anything. You are very welcome to what I have."

That was the most refreshing lunch I ever remember eating. I had eaten very little since leaving home two days before, and had spent for stage fare, express package, and so on, all but twenty-eight cents of the three dollars given me by father's hired man. I pushed on more

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

briskly, half hoping I might reach my destination before dark. But when night came it was very dark. I was three or four miles from the end of my journey, and the remainder of the road was very dim and through high prairie grass. I had walked over forty miles and was about exhausted. There was a cabin of round logs in a little grove on the prairie. It was a few miles northwest of where Pana now stands. There was a lone woman in the cabin. I asked her if I might stay over night.

"I don't like," she said, "to turn away strangers this dark night, but my old man went hunting and has not got back."

I pleaded with her to just give me shelter till daybreak.

"Well," said she, "I haven't the heart to turn you off into the dark to walk across that prairie. You might be lost and the wolves get you. Come in!"

The husband came home at a late hour with some venison, for he had killed a deer. Early next morning we had breakfast of hard, fried venison, corn bread and milk.

"Now, what do I owe you?" I inquired of the man.

"Oh," said he, "we never charge strangers."

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

But I insisted on paying him something.

"Well, then, if you are a mind to, you may give the old woman a bit."

That meant a silver piece of twelve and one-half cents. I had only a twenty-five-cent piece and a three-cent piece. When I handed the woman the twenty-five-cent piece, they both exclaimed, "Oh, we haven't any change, just keep your money, and sometime when you are passing this way, you may hand us the change."

But I insisted that they should take the twenty-five cents and I would wait for the change until I came that way again. They consented. I have never met them since. I wish I could thank them afresh for their hospitality. All I had in the world was the clothes I wore, the three-cent piece, and the box of books. I carried the three-cent piece in my pocket for nearly thirty years as a precious memento, and an incentive to economy. I finally lost it, but the grateful memories associated with it grow more and more green as the years roll on.

I soon arrived on the railroad line at the headquarters of the man for whom I was to work. It was a short distance south of where the city of Pana has since been built. The man's wife and daughter did the cooking. The boarders were

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

mostly Irishmen. I went to work with them. When Sunday came, all put on clean shirts but me. I had no change of clothes, nor money to buy any. But there was a stream of water near by. I thought I must get clean somehow. The sun shone warm toward noon in a sand-bank on the north side of the stream, and there was a grove of willows on the north side of the sand-bank. I washed my shirt and hung it upon the willows to dry while I sat on the sunny sand-bank and kept a sharp lookout ready to jump and hide in the willows if any one came along. The shirt was dried, but badly wrinkled.

At supper time the good woman said to me, "What in the world is the matter with your shirt?"

I had to tell her.

"Lawsee me! My dear child," she exclaimed, "why didn't you tell me you had no change? Now, I must make you a shirt this very night, and Sally must help, if it is Sunday."

Sally was her young daughter. So she and her daughter sat up that night, made the garment, and washed and ironed it ready for me Monday morning.

The five weeks I was with that family at their shanty of a boarding house on the prairie, I was

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

treated as if I were kith and kin. Thirty years passed and I had not seen the mother who made that shirt for me. Then I went one Sunday to preach in a school-house in a remote district of Illinois, and there I recognized seated before me in the meeting that same little bow-legged man who hired me on the streets of Springfield and his wife who was so kind to the runaway boy. I must go home with them for dinner. It was like a communion service of happy and grateful recollections.

I drove the oxen with the scraper the first month. I worked with the Irishmen and we had a good time reading "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in the shade at the noon hour, and I also experimented on them with my phrenological bust. But I thought I could make more and be more independent by taking a contract for a job of shoveling dirt at so much per yard. Before I had finished this job, I spied a covered wagon coming across the prairie. A large, tall man was walking ahead of it. The man was my grandfather Douthit. My father was driving the wagon. They had been with another load of silver and gold to Springfield, and had somehow got track of me. Grandfather told me that mother was greatly distressed about me. Father

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

wanted me to go home for her sake, and he promised that if I would go and help make another crop, I should go to school the next fall at the new Academy that was then being built in Shelbyville. I said I must finish my contract at grading first, and then I would go home, and I did. But I could not enter the Academy for nearly a year afterwards. That was in the spring of 1854.

I was very kindly received by the good principal, Charles W. Jerome, and his assistants. The school was founded and conducted under Methodist auspices; but in a liberal Christian spirit. There was no sectarianism or bigotry about it to hurt any of us. It stood for clean habits, no liquor and no tobacco, nor anything that defiled. The daily morning reading of the Bible, with prayer and song, are among the most precious and blessed memories of my life. Principal Jerome is now living in Atlanta, Georgia, over eighty years of age. While a zealous Methodist, he has been a constant and helpful friend to me in the mission of my life.

Principal Jerome permitted me to occupy a little room in the seminary building where I slept and boarded myself, with the help my

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

mother could give. I earned my tuition acting as janitor. I also earned something as book-agent. I sold Fowler & Wells's publications, especially those written by Rev. G. S. Weaver. One of his books was entitled "Hopes and Helps for the Young." My first piece committed to memory and declaimed in school was from that book. The subject was "Perseverance." The piece closed with Longfellow's "Psalm of Life." That book was a favorite with many of the students. I was surprised to learn in after years that the author was a Universalist minister. Dr. Weaver is still living, or was a few weeks ago,—1908,—about ninety years of age, at Canton, New York, the seat of the Universalist Divinity School. He has been very kind to me, and often writes me words of hearty sympathy and good cheer.

During my attendance at the Shelby Academy, I also taught a subscription school in arithmetic and writing. This school was held on Friday evenings and Saturdays and Sundays. People who try to read my scrawls now laugh skeptically when they learn that the writer was once a teacher of penmanship. The school was ten miles from Shelbyville. I walked to it over

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

muddy roads. Sometimes I had to wade waist deep through cold water, across swollen streams, to meet the appointments.

The hired man who loaned me the three dollars when I first left home was as good as his word. While I was at the Academy he would come to Shelbyville and, when sober, would come to the school door and ask for "Jack" Douthit, as I was then called. I would have to go to the door, for he was diffident about coming in. Then he would ask how I was getting along, and if I needed some more cash, and would insist on loaning it to me, saying: "Never mind, if you never pay it. I'm a sinner and never had any larnin, but I want you to be larned. Maybe you'll be President some day." When I left school I owed him twenty-five dollars or more. It seemed a big sum, but I paid it, though he insisted in after years in helping me more. He would say: "If I don't let you have it, I will spend it for drink." During the Civil War he was in prison for a long time near the home of his own people in the state of Tennessee. I wanted to visit him to help him to liberty, but could not. When he escaped from the prison he came to see me by night. He had got into a spree on the way and had been in the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

calaboose, for he was riotous and dangerous when drinking. He was feeling very badly and suffering intense remorse. He asked me to pray God to forgive him, and vowed he would drink no more. He then went back to his people in Tennessee, and his enemies stole upon him at night when he was in bed, suffering with wounds, and shot him to death. Dear, faithful old friend! I would rather meet your fate in the Great Hereafter than that of the fellows who for your vote or your money tempted you to ruin.

After two terms at the Academy, I was engaged to teach in the primary department. After one year as teacher I resolved to go and work my way, if possible, through Antioch College at Yellow Springs, Ohio, for I had read of Horace Mann, the President, and I longed to be seated at the feet of the man whom I had learned to love without seeing. But there were good, pious people who sincerely believed that Antioch College was an infidel institution and that its President was a dangerous man, leading young people astray. Many young men and women were kept in that way from being blessed by that great educator, statesman and philanthropist. I heard that I might have a chance

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

to pay my way through Antioch College by manual labor and I started for Yellow Springs in the fall of 1856.

On leaving Shelbyville my good Methodist pastor gave me a note of introduction to Dr. Curry, President of Asbury University, (now DePauw), Greencastle, Indiana. I stopped over and called on President Curry. He received me kindly and urged me to remain and go to school there, and he would give me a chance to work my way in part. While seated in the depot, feeling very lonely and thinking of Dr. Curry's proposal, a woman with a sunny, motherly face approached me and spoke to me kindly, and then called her husband and introduced him. The gentleman was Professor Butler of Wabash College. He was a cousin of Mrs. Lydia Sigourney, the author and poet. To their inquiries I told them where I was going. They said I had better go to Wabash College at Crawfordsville, Indiana, which was only thirty miles distant. They promised to get me a chance to work my way there and they would be good friends to me. I was charmed by their kindness, and next day walked to Crawfordsville. I was given a room in the college, where I worked and boarded myself, mostly on baked potatoes and graham

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

bread and milk, for six months. The diet was wholesome, but studying hard and eating alone was not favorable to good digestion. I became miserably homesick. President White and Professors Hovey, Hadley and Butler were very kind to me. They said I might go home for a visit; and, if I would return to complete some studies, they would have me sent to Lane Theological Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio, to prepare for the ministry. I accepted the offer on condition that I would not be obliged to enter the ministry of any particular sect. Now my father was strongly opposed to my being an educated minister. He thought I would make a better stock dealer or merchant. When he learned that they were going to make a preacher of me, he offered to furnish means to establish me in the book and drug business, if I would stop going to school. I yielded to the temptation, and so dealt in books and drugs for a year. But I still wanted to be a preacher.

IV

One cause of my homesickness and nervous dyspepsia at Wabash was the want of female society, — a want that would have been gratified at Antioch College, for that was the only college then in the country, unless it was Oberlin, that stood for the co-education of the sexes. I had mother, sisters, aunts and cousins at home, in the district school and at “Shelby Male and Female Academy,” as the seminary was first called; but at Wabash College I became acquainted with no woman except the one who baked graham bread for me. I was too diffident, and could not dress well enough to cultivate acquaintances. In my extreme loneliness I took consolation in correspondence. By a sort of romantic “happen so,” as some would call it, though I prefer to think of it as a special Providence, I got into correspondence with Miss Emily Lovell of East Abington, Mass. I had never met her — I had only read some of her verses in print, and I felt drawn toward her, so that I was encouraged to tell her frankly about

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

myself, my ambitions, and the noted people and authors I liked, among whom were Longfellow, Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, Mrs. Stowe, Dr. Geo. S. Weaver, author of "Hopes and Helps for the Young," "The Two Ways of Life" and other books published by Fowler & Wells, for whom I had been acting as agent. Miss Lovell promptly responded to say that my favorite authors and people were hers also. We told each other frankly about our families, our yearnings to be good and to do good. She told me how intensely interested she had been in reading the life of Mrs. Sarah Edgerton Mayo,—first wife of the late Rev. A. D. Mayo, D.D., and "The Lives of the Three Mrs. Judsons." She was enthusiastic to be a missionary. She wrote me verses about hearing music from the throne of God and seeing a magic hand reached out to clasp hers in life's journey. She wrote me a prayer in verse, of which the closing stanza is as follows:

"Guide Thou my deeds!
Teach me, O Lord, how rightly to discern
The wants my humble means may well supply;
I've gathered roses, and I fain would turn
Upon another's brow their grace to lie.
The wine of life with willing hands I'd serve

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

To needy objects; Father! can it be?
With heaven-born strength wilt Thou my spirit
nerve,
And guide my deeds that they may honor Thee."

I proposed that we send our ambrotypes to Professor L. N. Fowler and let him decide our fitness for each other. He made a remarkably accurate "hit" when he said the woman would be a better wife for me than I could be husband for her.

"The young lady," he said, "is of high moral character, and she is talented, domestic, affable, playful and very affectionate; but she is a timid sensitive soul, and it would nearly kill her to be scolded. However, if you make up your mind to be largely guided by her counsel and conform to her nature, you can spend a happy, useful and mutually helpful life together."

I was very unhappy to think myself not worthy of such a talented, pure, lovely woman. I told her the worst faults which Prof. Fowler mentioned, namely, my impulsive temper and self-will. I felt that I ought to give up the idea of wedding one so good. All the same, when we finally met, she said she would take the risk.

We were married at East Abington, (now

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Rockland) Mass., November 2, 1857, by Rev. Varnum Lincoln, the Universalist minister. She was a native of that place, and her parents were natives of that vicinity. Her grandfather Lovell was a soldier of the Revolution, and fought at Bunker Hill. General Solomon Lovell, he who during the Revolutionary War led the Penobscot Expedition, and my wife's people have a common ancestry.

My wife in her girlhood attended Mt. Caesar Seminary, Keene, New Hampshire. In early life she contributed verses and stories to such periodicals as the Universalist *Ladies Monthly Magazine* and the *New York Evening Post*, when the latter was edited by William Cullen Bryant. For several years during our mission work, besides attention to household duties, she gave lessons to young people in Latin and French and taught subscription schools. In the beginning of my ministry, especially when I was disabled, she would write the sermons for me to preach. To this woman, under God, I owe most of what I have been and what I have done of good for nearly fifty years; and our children, two sons and two daughters, have been constantly co-workers with us. Winifred, our youngest daughter and my housekeeper now,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

came as a Christmas gift when the mother was busy preparing for the first Christmas tree I ever saw, and the first in this county, so far as I know. It was for the Sunday-school at Log Church on Christmas Eve, 1871; and from the time that child was old enough to be carried to church and Sunday-school, she has never to this day missed weekly attendance at church and Sunday-school, excepting probably a half dozen times, and then only on account of illness. For many years she has been a constant Sunday-school teacher.

Our youngest son, Robert Collyer, is pastor of the Unitarian Church, Castine, Me. George Lovell, our eldest son, has been a constant helper in church work, besides acting as business manager for *Our Best Words* and for Post-office Mission and Lithia Springs Chautauqua. I could not manage the Chautauqua without such a helper. Our eldest daughter, Helen, wife of Mr. Joseph W. Garis, a railroad employee, lives at Lake Geneva, Wis., and has ever been a most faithful and cheerful helper.

After our marriage, my wife and I had charge of the public schools at Hillsboro, Ill., for the year 1858, and then we returned to East Abington, Mass. At Hillsboro I saw Abraham Lin-



EMILY LOVELL DOUTHIT

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

coln for the last time, and heard him speak at the time of the famous debate with Senator Douglas, in 1858. He spoke in a circus tent at Hillsboro. I see him now as he walked into the tent at the farther end from where I was seated. His trousers were baggy at the knees, and he looked like some ungainly giant. A crowd was around him, but he seemed a head taller than the rest. He and Douglas did not actually meet there. Douglas had visited Hillsboro a few days before and made his speech to an immense crowd out in a grove, for the weather was fair. The day appointed for Lincoln threatened rain, so that the circus tent was engaged for him. He had spoken but a little while when the rain poured down in torrents and drove the people off their seats to stand close around the speaker's stand in the middle of the tent. Some one suggested that they stop the meeting till the rain was over, but the crowd cried: "Oh! no. Go on, go on!" Lincoln did "go on" for nearly two hours, and the people kept crowding closer and closer to him as if they were hypnotized. Mr. Lincoln seemed to me to grow taller and his face became more radiant the longer he spoke.

I remember what he said of Senator Douglas's theory of "Popular Sovereignty," that is, the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

right of the people to vote slavery up or down in the territories. "The fact is," said Lincoln, "Judge Douglas's theory of popular sovereignty seems to me about as thin as the soup made from the shadow of a starved pigeon." In the same speech I remember his saying: "There is an honest old man down in Georgia by the name of Toombs. He boasts that he will call the roll of his slaves at the foot of Bunker Hill Monument. Dear fellow, he little knows the temper of the Northern people upon the subject of slavery, or he would never make such a boast as that."

Up to the time I heard that speech of Lincoln's I had been a Douglas Democrat, though opposed to slavery and an advocate of total abstinence. But when Senator Douglas spoke in Hillsboro they made a banquet for him at night where wine and whiskey flowed shamefully. When Lincoln came, his friends proposed a banquet for him, and were going to have liquors, But Lincoln protested. He said his friends would please him best if they furnished no drinks that would intoxicate, and they obeyed him. From that time I was a convert to Lincoln, and would have died in his stead. I wept at his death as if he had been my best friend on earth.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Then I solemnly vowed that I would henceforth live to keep his memory green, taking for my motto his memorable words, "With malice toward none and charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work that is given us to do."

I have tried to keep that motto at the head of a column of my missionary publication, *Our Best Words*, for nearly thirty years.

I have a clear recollection of Lincoln, as I first used to see him in the old hotel across the street from the court-house where he stopped during the terms of the circuit court in Shelbyville. I see the Great Commoner as he sat on the porch, southern fashion, when court was not in session, his long, lank limbs doubled up, or straightened out with feet propped up, while he read the paper or a book, or chatted familiarly with the old farmers or his fellow attorneys. He never told a story just for the story alone, but always to clinch an argument.

I heard him make a speech in the old court-house in Shelbyville, in which he gave his reasons for breaking from the old Whig party and helping to organize the Free Soil, or Republican party. There was a very intense partisan spirit in those days in southern Illinois, and the sym-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

pathy was nearly all with the South, so that an outspoken anti-slavery man was considered hardly human. Politicians were accustomed to indulge in personal abuse and ridicule of their opponents, and so did lawyers in pleading in court. Consequently, when I went with my father, as a boy, to the court-house to hear political speeches or the pleadings of lawyers, I always expected to hear them hurl denunciations and abuse at their opponents. But on that day, when Lincoln gave his reasons for leaving the Whig party, I witnessed a very different scene. I was surprised at the very pleasant manner and kindly spirit in which Mr. Lincoln treated his opponents.

While he spoke, some who had been his associates in the Whig party grew furious, interrupted his speech, and hurled abusive epithets at him. I wondered that he took it all so calmly and with such self-control. I do not remember any words of that speech, I only know that he bore testimony against slavery ; but I shall never forget how he looked and the manner in which he spoke — how patient he was toward his cross critics. I went home and told my mother that I had heard a lawyer and a politician speak with-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

out talking harshly or abusing anybody. I had never witnessed the like before in my life.

Lincoln came once again to Shelbyville to make a speech after the organization of the Republican party. There were only about half a dozen persons in Shelbyville and vicinity who called themselves Republicans. They invited Lincoln to come to Shelbyville and advertised him to speak in the court-house. Most of the old partisans turned the cold shoulder and said they would not go to hear him. As the hour approached, it seemed as if there would be scarcely any one present. Then a few of the friends went to Lincoln and said, "Let us not try to hold any meeting at the court-house this time, but just have a little quiet caucus in the back room of Mr. B.'s shoe-shop." To this Lincoln promptly replied: "Oh! we must go into the court-house according to appointment, no matter how few may come. We must not seem ashamed of our principles. They should be proclaimed from the house-tops all over the nation."

V

During the year 1859 I was employed part of the time with Prof. D. P. Butler in the branch office in Boston, of Fowler & Wells, phrenologists and publishers, of New York City. During part of the year I lectured on the Science of Man and the Laws of Health through the towns along the coast between Boston and Plymouth. I was religiously a wanderer, yearning for church fellowship, but the Spiritualists and Abolitionists were about the only people that were making any noise, and the only ones with whom I found any sympathy. The abolition orators were thundering, as on Sinai, against the indifference and infidelity of the church in regard to the national sin, African slavery. I had become much interested in psychology and the phenomena of spiritism. But none of these things satisfied my deep religious longings. Nearly all the public preaching I heard was of the tearing down sort, and I felt the need of reconstruction. In other words, I was in that transition from the old to the new theology

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

where hundreds make shipwreck of faith for want of rational religious sympathy. If it had not been for my wife's influence and the reading of Beecher's and Parker's sermons and prayers, and also now and then newspaper reports of sermons of Drs. Henry W. Bellows and James Freeman Clarke, I think I should have become an Ishmaelite in religion.

The anti-slavery agitation caused me to read James Freeman Clarke's and Theodore Parker's sermons as reported in the Boston papers. I would have gone to hear Dr. Clarke preach if I could have had the opportunity. I was drawn to him because I learned that he had exchanged pulpits with Theodore Parker when no other preachers would do so. I do not remember seeing notices in the papers of any Unitarian preaching other than that of Parker and Clarke. I lectured in several towns where there were Unitarian churches, but, strange to say, did not get acquainted with any Unitarians. I read and was thrilled by Parker's sermons on "The Permanent and Transient in Christianity" and "The False and True Revival of Religion." I made an effort to hear Parker at Music Hall the last Sunday he preached, before he went to Italy to die. I was then staying sixteen miles from

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Boston, and I had not money to pay carfare to the city and return, so I resolved to walk, and started early that Sunday morning; but when I had gone about half-way I grew faint and turned back, to regret the rest of my life that I did not start the day before, in order to improve the only opportunity to see and hear the man whose printed words had revived in me new life and hope. It may be Dr. Channing would have helped me as much as Parker; but I had no chance to read him—in fact I had scarcely heard of him

While employed at Fowler and Wells's office, near the Old South Meeting-house in Boston, I first saw Thomas Starr King. He and Henry Ward Beecher were walking arm in arm and conversing playfully with each other. I got into touch too with William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. One day a compactly built man with genial, ruddy face walked into the office and asked for a copy of the *Phrenological Journal*, paid for it, spoke a few pleasant words and passed out. There was a picture of the man and a description of his character in that number of the Journal. The man was the Hon. Henry Wilson, the shoemaker and

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

statesman, who was Vice President during President Grant's first term.

When Henry Wilson was on his death bed I read in the papers that he kept beside him a little book entitled "Daily Strength for Daily Needs," being a selection of scripture, poetry, and comforting thoughts by sages and saints. I secured a copy of that book at once, and have kept it close beside me ever since, at home and abroad. When I miss getting a morning thought from the book, it often seems as if I had failed to get the needed key note to the day.

In the fall of 1859 I came back to Shelby County, and my wife and I, now with one child, went to keeping house in a little cabin on a farm near my birthplace. The first time I got a chance to speak, I declared myself an Abolitionist. I believe I was the only one then in Shelby County who called himself an Abolitionist in public. This shocked all of my friends and relatives. It was terrible, they thought; for in their eyes, an Abolitionist was a monster, and now to think I had married a Yankee wife and turned Abolitionist! The newspapers made a sensation of it. For ex-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ample, it was reported that, in a Sunday-school talk, I had called John Brown a martyr and compared him to George Washington. I did not say that, but I did say that we must beware how we judged those who were unpopular because they were a foe to slavery. I said that even Washington was unpopular with millions of people, when he was ready to die for the freedom of others, and that those who die for the liberty of their fellow-beings to-day, may, in the future ages, wear martyrs' crowns. This remark was quickly interpreted as referring to the hanging of John Brown, and I was called a John Brownite for years, despite the fact that I did not at all approve of his bloody raid at Harper's Ferry, though I did sympathize with and admire the pluck of the old hero.

Practically, so far as the local newspapers were concerned, there was no free speech on political questions in those days in southern Illinois. Although instinctively hating African slavery, yet through ignorance, I gave my first vote for James Buchanan for President, but I persisted in expressing abolition sentiments and was ridiculed and laughed at for my inconsistency. When my eyes were open to see my

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

folly, I tried to make amends, not by allying myself with any of the existing parties but by pleading for free speech and fair play. It was my conviction that civil war might be averted if the questions at issue were only fairly presented to all the American people. Light was what was most needed; so I thought then, and I have seen no reason to change my opinion. But alas! the light could only come through the lurid flames of devastating war.

“Fair Play in Politics,” was the heading of a plea of a half newspaper column which I wrote in the early summer of 1860 and sent to the editor of the *Okaw Democrat* for publication. The editor being a personal friend, I had hopes of the plea being admitted. After considerable squirming, he told me that he would be glad to favor me in any way that he could, but for the sake of the party he could not admit my communication; “and,” said he, “if you take any decided stand against the old party, I shall be compelled to denounce you publicly.” I did take a decided stand. But there was no paper through which to get my ideas before the public until the following July.

On Saturday morning, July 28, 1860, the first number of *The Shelby Freeman* was pub-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

lished in Shelbyville. Mr. E. E. Chittenden, a frail but plucky man, was editor. My rejected article was published in the first number and I was made associate editor. *The Freeman* advocated the election of Abraham Lincoln for President, and was published weekly till he was elected and inaugurated and the first call made for volunteers to suppress the rebellion. Then the editor, Mr. Chittenden, answered the call and went to the war, and the first newspaper in southern Illinois devoted to free soil, free labor and free speech, died. In April, 1863, the press which we had used was bought by John W. Johnson, to print *The Shelby County Union*.

I enlisted from Shelby County in the army of the Union, and went up to the state capital to be examined and mustered in. I was pale-faced and frail in body. The examining surgeon shook his head doubtfully. I thought about it over night. I had left my mother in great distress and my wife reluctant to have me go. I was the eldest son, the other children were still young, my mother sorely needed my presence, and I had promised to live near her as long as she lived, which was not expected to be long. Several of the friends with whom I

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

had enlisted, among them my old teacher, Charles W. Jerome, advised me to return home, saying that I could do as much for the cause at home as I could as a soldier. Therefore I returned, just as determined to die at home for my country, if exigency required, as if in the army. I lectured on the slavery question and "preached politics" as they said, although I knew no politics except "Liberty and Union, one and inseparable."

In the spring of 1863, I got into trouble with the "Knights of the Golden Circle." The real object of that order was to resist the draft, and secretly help the rebellion, but it appeared before the public in the guise of a "Peace Democracy." Thus it misled many well-meaning people and gave a chance for bushwhackers and other emissaries of the confederacy to come into southern Illinois. One of these came from Missouri into our district. He called himself a preacher. He held meetings at Liberty Meeting-house. This house had been built for the double purpose of school and church, in fact all sorts of meetings, for it was the only house where public meetings could be held in that district; and I had stipulated when soliciting funds to build it, that it should be always

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

open to the community and sacred to free speech. A lodge of the "Knights of the Golden Circle" was organized there by the Missouri bushwhacker, and a score or more of my neighbors joined it. Besides secret sessions, the lodge held open meetings, to which everybody was welcome. In these meetings peace and union were talked.

I went to a meeting of the Circle and begged for the privilege of speaking in behalf of peace and good-will among neighbors. The Missouri man was presiding. I arose and said: "Mr. Chairman: I am glad to hear that this is a Democratic peace meeting. I believe in peace and true democracy. Therefore, I beg leave to occupy ten minutes or less in reading a letter from a brave and patriotic Democrat, Major General Rosecrans, and also a short article from the *Chicago Times*, the leading Democratic organ of Illinois,"—these authorities both condemned the Golden Circle organizations,—
"Can I have the privilege?"

The chairman replied that the meeting was a Democratic love feast and a private affair for the purpose of reorganizing the good old Democratic party, that I could not be allowed to speak or read anything, and that if I was keen

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

to exercise free speech I could "go out to the brush and bellow forth." To the credit of the majority in that meeting, be it said, the chairman was censured for the summary way in which I was refused a hearing. Then, after I was put out, was held the secret session in which the so-called preacher and bushwhacker made a rousing speech. He said: "Had it not been for such weak-kneed cowardly traitors (the Douglas Democrats) we should have had the tyrant Lincoln dethroned long ago, yea, verily, and beheaded. I tell you we must prepare to fight. Clean out your old guns and get ready. If you have no gun, go up north and press one, and while you are there press a horse and ammunition. If we can't fight on a large scale, we can bushwhack it. If you don't know how, I can teach you. I have had some experience in bushwhacking myself."

My younger brother, George, who was not known to the chairman and was so very quiet and sleepy-looking that night that he was scarcely noticed in the noisy crowd, was not put out. This brother had an excellent memory, and reported that speech word for word. I wrote out an account of this meeting and extracts from the speeches, and I took it to the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

only newspaper then printed in the county. It was rejected, not because its correctness was questioned, but because the press of the county was then intensely partisan, and the editor said it would never do to publish such a report. It would create discord in the party and make votes for the "black Republicans." I then sent the report to the *St. Louis Democrat*, the Republican daily most widely read in this part of Illinois at that time. On Thursday, March 19, 1863, it appeared in that paper on the first page under flaming headlines that startled the country. Here at home the excitement was intense. It was as if a bombshell had burst, and somebody must surely get hurt or leave for other parts in a hurry. Several of those who heard the speech of the confessed bushwhacker acknowledged that it was correctly reported. I learned years afterwards that all concerned in that "Knights of the Golden Circle" meeting held a council over my report. They all agreed that I had "got it mighty korect"; but the question was, how I got it. Some suspected a traitor in camp, but most of them thought that after they had voted me "down and out" that night, I had climbed through the house roof and witnessed the whole proceedings through

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the scuttle-hole in the loft. They never suspected my young brother.

It was hot times for me for a while. Resolutions were passed and vigilance committees were appointed to warn me, and as a last resort to threaten that if I did not desist reporting names and speeches for public print I should be treated as a spy. I was so stubborn that no doubt the reader would have been spared these reminiscences but for the fact that my father and mother and a large number of my kindred who, though grieved at my outspokenness, strongly resented any violent treatment of me. As for the bushwhacker and his victims, it seemed that the only way they could remain, in the locality and save themselves from arrest by government officials was to deny my report and publish a libel on me. The bushwhacker therefore prepared a manifesto, vindicating himself as a very honorable and peaceable gentleman, stating that he had never uttered the words reported of him in the daily papers, and that the secret conference, held at Liberty Meeting-house, was in the interest of peace and harmony among neighbors; and adding that Jasper Douthit was a notorious blood-thirsty Abolitionist, a stirrer up of strife among other-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

wise peaceable neighbors. Then, to induce others to sign that manifesto, the bushwhacker told them he knew that the "black-hearted Abe Lincoln" had sent me a lot of government arms and ammunition which I had secreted in my house on the prairie, eight miles from Shelbyville. He induced nine of my neighbors to sign this statement and it was published in the *Okaw Patriot* of June 12, 1863.

The manifesto extolled the bushwhacker as "a fine school-teacher, a gentleman, patriot and peacemaker," declared my report of the meeting false and libelous, and continued as follows:

"With a brief history of the author of the article in the *Democrat*, we close. He is the son of a respectable Democrat citizen of the neighborhood. In his better days he went to Boston to attend school and received a stroke of negro-phobia which fractured his brain. He is a man of small calibre. He is regarded by those who know him as maliciously dangerous to the community. He pays homage to John Brown. This Bostonian Jasper is a breeder of sedition, and is daily seeking the life-blood of the genuine peace men of our country. He should be cautioned by those who have any influence over him, if any such there be, and if he persists in such conduct his presence may become unendurable."

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Most of the nine signers told me afterwards that they had never read the article until it appeared in print. All of them abundantly atoned for that wrong which they were led unwittingly to do me. Some of them later became earnest members of my congregation and helpers in my work, and I ministered at the funeral of several of them. Only one of the nine is now living. He is over eighty years of age, and his home is in a distant city, but he wants to be regarded as one of my parishioners and writes me friendly words of good cheer. One of the number was converted at a revival meeting one night years after the war, and on the next morning he mounted a horse and rode five miles to see me and say: "Douthit, I was induced by that Tory bushwhacker to sign that libel about you when I knew it was not true. I have been ashamed of it ever since, but I could never get courage to ask your pardon until now. Will you forgive me?"

I had already forgiven him and everybody else, and I think just then I was the unhappier man of the two, because I could not remember aught for which to ask his forgiveness.

In 1864 rumors were flying thick that any-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

one who attempted to take the enrollment for a draft would be shot. There were men who boasted openly that they would do the murderous deed. Bloody riots in resisting the enrollment were of frequent occurrence in southern Illinois and Indiana. Several enrolling officers had been shot down. All the people seemed to be walking on the thin crust of a volcano that was ready to burst at any hour. "The Knights of the Golden Circle" were drilling in sight of my home on the prairie, to resist the "tyrant Lincoln," as they called him. I would talk and reason with some of my neighbors, but many were glum and mum, and would give me no chance to talk with them. Under these circumstances I was appointed to take the enrollment in the eastern half of the county. On receiving my commission I was offered a company, or regiment of soldiers, to be stationed in the county, but I objected to their presence, because I knew that in the counties where soldiers were present there had been riot and bloodshed. I was advised to start well armed, but I declined to do this. I determined to do the work peaceably, or die in the attempt. However, I took the precaution to change my hat and coat and to ride a different horse, from day to day, as I went

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

about the work. This expedient, with the prudent co-operation of friends in both parties, probably saved one enrolling officer from assassination. Years afterwards some persons confessed to me that they, with others, had resolved on shooting me if I were seen near their homes. "I shall always be thankful," said one man to me, "that we did not know that you were around until you had done the work and gone."

My plan was to go only to those I thought I could trust and get the names of the others from the trusty ones. This worked very well, except in a few instances where I made the mistake of revealing myself to foes instead of friends. Some had read that bushwhacker's libel in the papers and they believed their papers then more than they did their Bibles. It was just such ignorance and partisanship that made the Civil War possible.

The first morning I went out to take the enrollment I went to the house of an old citizen who had heard, for he could not read, of the rumors about me. He was in the field at work. His wife kindly invited me into the house and sent the children after their father. He came, walking fast, and as he entered the room he snatched a gun from out the rack over the door,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

and holding it up, cried out, with some unquotable expletives: "Now you get out and go home in a hurry, or you will be shot!"

I arose and replied as mildly as possible, under the circumstances, calling him by name. "If you wish to shoot me, pop away. But I don't want to hurt you, nor anyone else. This is all the weapon I carry," showing him a little pen-knife, "but let me tell you that I am not going home. I am going to do my duty to my country, and if I am killed there are many thousands to take my place."

"Well, Jasper," said the man, "I don't want to shoot you myself. I couldn't do it, anyhow, for your mother's sake. She is a good woman, but I am afraid you will be shot if you don't quit."

One night after this there were a dozen shots fired through the open door of my house about midnight. As the last shot was fired I walked to the door in my night-clothes, but the shooters dodged behind a hazel-thicket, and nobody was hurt. Until that time I carried no firearms and kept none in the house, although it was rumored and believed by many that I had secreted a lot of government arms in or near my house. A few days after the shooting I was in Shelbyville,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

when an old friend and captain in the army, who was home on a furlough, persuaded me to take home a six-shooter belonging to him, remarking that it was a duty that I owed my friends to use it in self-defense, if attacked. It was loaded and I carried it home and practised with it at an object the size of a man about ten steps distant, until all the barrels were empty. I missed the object every time, but it was not the fault of the revolver. Then, laughing at myself for my folly, I laid the revolver away empty and made haste to return it to its owner in good order. That was the extent of my carnal warfare during all the "unpleasantness."

This little incident would not be worth mentioning but for the fact that at that time I had become the "raw head and bloody bones" of the neighborhood. Little children on the road would hide behind trees when they saw me coming; men would arm themselves to pass by my home. To those who know me it seems amusing now, but it was serious then. It shows how partisan demagoguery, working on ignorance and prejudice, can inaugurate civil war and lead peaceable and well-meaning citizens to shed each other's blood.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Among the many incidents that flood my memory, illustrative of the ignorance that prevailed, I will relate one more. A person who had been to Shelbyville and heard some talk about peace conventions and Democratic victories at elections in New York and Indiana passed by my house on his way home, and the following conversation occurred. The exact words are given, as I wrote them down immediately afterward:

“Hello, Douthit! Have you heard the news?”

“No, what is it?”

“Well, we’re gwine to have peace; we’ve pinte a man, Vallandingham, to go and see Jeff about arranging it, and, if Old Abe don’t give him a free pass to——, where’s the place where Jeff Davis lives?”

“Richmond, do you mean?”

“Oh! yes; that’s the place. Well, if Old Abe don’t give Vallandingham a pass to Richmond, as I was gwine to say, we’re gwine to succeed (secede) right off. They say New York and Indiana have succeeded already. Hurrah for Vallandingham!”

Many are the memories of encouraging words that were whispered or spoken aloud to me in

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

hours of trial. About this time I preached a sermon on "The True Path to Peace," which was printed in full in the *Shelby County Union*. I advocated peace by a vigorous prosecution of the inevitable war and by freedom for the slaves. It was resolved, by several who were opposed to my views, that I should be summarily silenced if I persisted in expressing such sentiments and praying for the President of the United States. Accordingly, one bright Sunday morning at the hour I had appointed for services, a large crowd of "peace Democrats" gathered in and around the little log school house. They were armed with shotguns, rifles, revolvers, bowie-knives, and heavy clubs. They looked sour and surly. The congregation gathered and filled the house. I did not know any of my friends were armed. Scarcely a word was spoken by anyone. The time came to begin service. A deathly silence reigned as I took my seat in the pulpit. Everybody seemed to be asking, "What next?" Just then a quiet, conversative man whom I had never known to take any active part in any meetings, and whom I did not know as being in sympathy with me, walked gently up the aisle and drawing near to my ear, whispered:

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

“Douthit, go on and preach and pray as you think right. There are plenty of us to stand by you.” I was determined to speak my convictions anyhow, and did clear my conscience very well that day. Nevertheless, I have always regarded that action of so modest and quiet a man as a sort of special inspiration. I shall never cease to remember with gratitude how the best of human nature as well as the worst showed itself in those days of trial.

VI

During most of this trying time I was preaching without ordination. I can hardly remember when I did not feel "called" to be a preacher. When a mere lad I felt so much desire to be a Christian that I would gladly have walked a long journey to find a congregation that would give me fellowship on my simple confession of a determined purpose to live a Christian life. But all the churches I knew required much more as conditions of membership, and insisted upon tes's very different from what I found in the simple teachings of Jesus. The churches would tell me to take the Bible as it reads and follow Christ, and then would insist on my taking the Bible as *they read* it, and following *their* creeds. In short, I must be a slave to other people's opinions about the Bible and about Christ. I could not honestly be that. Therefore, for many years I was obliged to walk alone; and I would almost have lost faith in all churches and

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

all religion but for a mother's love and saintly example.

When about twenty-one years old I made public confession of religion and was baptized, kneeling in the waters of the Okaw, at Shelbyville. Rev. Isaac Groves, then pastor of the First Methodist Church, performed the ceremony. I worshiped and worked with that church for several years. Though never yielding formal assent to its articles of faith, I was treated as kindly as if I had been a *bona fide* member, and I have ever held that church in grateful regard as my foster mother in religion.

Dear old "Auntie" Graham, was the first woman I ever heard utter a prayer in public, and that prayer powerfully moved me. She was the mother or grandmother of the Methodists in Shelbyville, and was loved by everybody. Her speech in meeting was to me a marvelous thing, for I had heard all my life that it was wrong for a woman to speak in meeting. It was but a short time after that, "Aunt Fanny" Gage, then of St. Louis, and later of New York City, spoke in Shelbyville against strong drink and pleaded most eloquently that mothers, wives, sisters and daughters should

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

have equal rights before the law with men. I became an enthusiastic convert and loved "Aunt Fanny" thenceforth as if she were my own aunt.*

How much it helped me to have loved and trusted persons to pray for me! This will explain how I came to be in some measure instrumental in starting one of the earliest revivals in the old Methodist church at Shelbyville. I had just started to school in Shelby Academy and was a green country boy without anyone in school that knew me, or that I knew, except indirectly. Some of the students made sport of me and laughed at my awkwardness. I had left home too against my father's wish and with my mother in trouble. This caused me great distress and I prayed God to help me to be a Christian and to prove to the family

* The first library at the beginning of my work at Log Church contained several of Mrs. Gage's books. They were published by the National Temperance Society, New York City. "The Old Still House" was one of the books of which I think she was the author. The scene of that story seemed to have been laid in southern Illinois. At least it was an exact picture of things as they had been and were there. The book was eagerly read until several copies were worn out. No book in our Sunday-school was ever read so much and with such good results.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

that I had only the best motives in leaving home. I was very shy and shrank from public notice. It was on a Sunday afternoon that I started to school in Shelbyville. I walked all the way, five miles, through the deep, dark woods, instead of going directly on the state road, where people would see me. I called at the door of the first house I came to in the edge of the town,—it was where the Chicago & Eastern Illinois railway depot now stands,—and it happened to be the humble home of former country acquaintances, namely William B. Jackson and his wife. I told them I had come to go to school and wanted to work for my board somewhere. “Very well,” they said, “come right in, Jasper; we will have something for you to do till you can do better.” They were as good as their word. The first job they gave me was to dig a cellar for them. Mr. Jackson was later for many years a Justice of the Peace in Shelbyville, and became a charter member, and a good one too, of the Unitarian church. He passed away years ago, but his widow still lives, over eighty-five years of age, a loyal member of my congregation.

It was in a shy, lonely and homesick mood that I went one Sunday night to the Methodist

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

church. A very boyish looking young man by the name of Phillip Minear preached, and the sermon seemed to be for me. At the close of the sermon the preacher said: "If there be any here who wish to be Christians and want to be prayed for, let them come forward and kneel at the altar while the congregation stands and sings a hymn." I had slipped into the very back seat near the door for I shrank from being seen in my plain clothes, but when this invitation was given I walked up the aisle and knelt at the altar alone,—the only one who went up that evening. Fervent prayers were made for the strange lad that few knew. I am not sure but it was "Auntie" Graham who made one of the prayers. Encouraged by the move, the minister announced a meeting for Monday evening; and on that evening a dozen or more, mostly young people, went to the altar with me. The meetings continued, and grew noisy with shouting, too noisy for me, because some of those who shouted did not impress me favorably, and some of the more zealous ones disgusted me. I quit going to the meetings, though they continued for a month or more, and were then transferred to another church in the county and held there for

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

several weeks. There were hundreds of converts. Meantime committees were sent to persuade me to again attend the meetings, but I stubbornly refused. Nevertheless, all the while I was wrestling in prayer and beseeching God for such a miraculous experience as my mother and grandparents had. I went to my mother, and she tried to reason with me that it was not necessary for me to have exactly her experience. She thought I was already a Christian although I did not know it. My grandfather Douthit, whom I loved and trusted, finally said to me, "Why, Jasper, you should not make such ado, and be asking God to give you the same experience that your mother had. St. John gives a very simple test of how we may know that we have religion. He says: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.' Now," continued my grandfather, "if you know that you love the brethren, you have got religion." I thought a moment, and exclaimed in rapture! "Why grandfather, of course I love *everybody*."

A few mornings after that talk with my grandfather, I went into a deep glen near Shelbyville to pray and thank God for the light



JORDAN UNITARIAN CHURCH

Dedicated Sept. 29, 1870



UNION CHURCH AT MODE

Dedicated July 20, 1873

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

that had come to me. It was winter and the trees were bare. But while I prayed, the winter woods seemed suddenly glowing with a wondrous light and beauty; and a sweet old hymn came to me, giving assurance that God sent Jesus to be my Deliverer, Saviour and Best Friend, forever. Then what a wonderful peace came to me! This is why the song, "Wonderful Peace," sung by Bishop McCabe at Lithia Springs, is one of my favorite songs. That morning as I walked the busy streets to school, the faces of all I met — men, women and children — seemed radiant with a light that never shone from sun or star. That was a heavenly vision which I have tried to obey for over fifty years.

The reader may smile at this religious experience and call it a mere fancy. Well, it was a mighty real and uplifting fancy to me which I hope never to forget, in time or eternity. I can but wish that more of those whom I have tried to serve would experience such a fancy, if it might strengthen and comfort them as it has strengthened and comforted me through life's hardest battles and sorest trials.

The majority of people drawn to my ministry have not had strong religious faith, nor

have they been trained to habitual public worship. On the contrary they have been alienated from the church and, except in a few conspicuous instances, they have been honest doubters, agnostics, and more intellectual and materialistic than spiritual. To preach to such people is harder work than to preach to spiritually-minded people and habitual church-goers. It draws on the nerves and vitality, unless the preacher is mighty in faith and full of the Holy Spirit. I remember once at Meadville, President Livermore spoke to me of this fact. "But," continued he, "such people are just the ones who need earnest, Christian, Unitarian preaching." Preaching to such people made me crave the fellowship of deeply spiritual religious people.

When asked how I became a Unitarian I reply that I suppose, like Topsy, "I jist growed." Though most of my ancestors were Calvinists and a few were Methodists, for several generations back, yet I cannot remember the time when I was not Unitarian in principle — that is, Unitarian in what to me to-day is the broadest, best sense of the word. I would emphasize the *unite*, and care less for the *arian* or *ism*, but we must have some name in this world in order to

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

do honest business. I became identified with the Unitarians simply because they were the only body of Christian believers, so far as I knew, who would ordain me and give me perfect freedom to preach the gospel as God gave me to see it, without dictation by Pope, Synod, or Conference. The Methodist people with whom I first taught and worshiped gave me, indeed, the liberty to speak in their class meetings; and when teaching in the primary department of the Shelby Academy, I made appointments to preach in the school-houses round about. I was preaching at least five years before receiving ordination in 1862. But there were some churches and school-houses where I was not allowed to preach. Therefore, the year before the Civil War began, I solicited funds and helped build an independent meeting-house in the woods four miles east and south of Shelbyville, which we named "Liberty," and which was free for religious and other public meetings. Here I tried to preach, and organized a Sunday-school. That was the house in which the "Knights of the Golden Circle" held their meetings. It was burned soon afterwards. The burden of my preaching in that house was for Union, Liberty, Charity, Temperance and

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Righteousness in religion and through the nation.

The preachers I heard fifty years ago had "an itch for disputation" and heresy hunting, so that congregations were split upon such questions as whether God made the Devil or the Devil made himself. There was bitter controversy and turning each other out of church on such questions as communion and baptism, regardless of how pure the character of the heretic might be. I thought that was all wrong, but I dare say I sometimes made the mistake of showing some of the same spirit which I condemned; for I have never found it difficult to show, on occasion, the requisite amount of indignation against what I believed to be wrong; while to "speak the truth in love," to be gentle amidst "an evil and perverse generation"—is not so easy.

My wife had often heard Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson speak, and she admired him and Theodore Parker, and told me that they were Unitarians. She thought the Unitarians would ordain me to preach, taking none but Christ for Master and Leader in religion. That was what I wanted. Accordingly I wrote Mr. Higginson. He replied in a very kind

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

letter, and referred me to Robert Collyer, "a noble man and a minister-at-large in Chicago. I don't know how radical he is, but he is liberal, which is better." Soon a hearty letter came from Brother Collyer, saying: "Come and see me, and go with me to our Western Conference at Detroit, Michigan." There on June 22, 1862, I was ordained to the Christian ministry. Moncure D. Conway, Charles G. Ames, Thomas J. Mumford, George W. Hosmer, and Robert Collyer took part in the service. Then I went back to my own country, preaching in groves and school-houses, for I was not allowed in the churches — till worn in body and sick at heart, I went again to see Brother Collyer. He looked at me and said: "My dear fellow, you are so thin I doubt if you can stand it to go through four years at Meadville, and I am afraid it will be a wet blanket to your enthusiasm, but you shall have a chance." Rev. J. G. Forman, then minister at Alton, Illinois, and Secretary of the Western Sanitary Commission, joined heartily with Collyer in sending me to Meadville. So I went.

The three years spent at the Meadville Theological School are remembered as the happiest and most helpful period of my life. My wife

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

and our two older children made a pleasant home for me, and all the associations of the school inspired me to do and be my best. I do not remember so much of what I learned from the text-books, but there is a flood of precious memories of the spirit and life that pervaded the school. Personal contact with such people as President A. A. Livermore, Doctors George W. Hosmer and Austin Craig (the genius and saint of the "Christian Connections"), Professors George L. Cary and Frederick Huidekoper, and such fellow students as Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Edward A. Horton, George H. Young, Isaac Porter, David Cronyn, Charles W. Wendte and the rest meant much to me, as well as the almost daily fellowship, the religious study and practice, the social worship and song, and Sunday service at church of such a minister as Richard Metcalf, whose sermon on "The Abiding Memory" went so deep into my heart that I shall never forget it. Then the uniform courtesy — the "kindness kindly expressed" — of the patrons of the school, the Shippens, the Huidekopers and others — and especially have I often thanked God for Miss Elizabeth Huidekoper's kindness to my family, and her helping hand from that

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

day till now, when at ninety years she is promoted and crowned forever among the benefactors of that school on God's hill — all, all abide in my memory as a living picture of "sweetness and light." I know there were cloudy days and nights of suffering; and at last I was obliged, because of my mother's distress, to go home to her instead of being present with my class at graduation. Nevertheless, memory now only notes the cloudless hours and cheerful faces.

While a student at Meadville Divinity School I received what I regard as one of the highest honors of my life, one for which I was certainly not qualified. I was offered the Presidency of the United Brethren College at Westfield, Clark County, Illinois. In scholarship I was not prepared for the position, but the United Brethren and I had been welded together by a furnace blast that tried most souls in the war for the Union and against slavery and intemperance. We had been emphasizing the *unite* for several years, so that we considered ourselves as one in spirit and purpose. I think it must have been from this fact that the Unitarian missionary was thus honored by the United Brethren. I remember that when I con-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

sulted our beloved President Livermore about the position offered me, he smilingly said: "Oh, Brother Douthit, you must finish the course here first, and then, if they want you, you may accept that position." But Westfield College has had better presidents than I could have made. It has grown and is now one of the most liberal Christian educational institutions in southern Illinois.

Soon after graduating at Meadville in 1867, I was called to the Unitarian Society in Princeton, Bureau County, Illinois. This society was a part of the congregation of the Rev. Owen Lovejoy, member of Congress and brother of the abolition martyr, Elijah P. Lovejoy. While at Princeton I first made the acquaintance of the late Carl Schurz. He was engaged to lecture there, and on the day of his lecture in the evening I met him in a public hall where a traveling phrenologist had hung on the wall likenesses to illustrate a series of lectures. Mr. Schurz was interested in phrenology. We had a pleasant talk about the pictures, among which was one of Bismarck, who happened to be the subject of his lecture that evening. I had learned to admire and trust Mr. Schurz when Lincoln was first nominated for President, and

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I had been greatly helped by the example of his heroic life and noble character. At Princeton I had also a very pleasant and most helpful acquaintance with William Cullen Bryant, the poet. Three of his brothers were members of my congregation, and my wife had been a contributor to the poet's paper. Before this acquaintance with the author of "Thanatopsis" I had read and thought more of Thomas Carlyle than of Emerson; but Mr. Bryant called my attention to the fact that Emerson was always sunny, sweet and optimistic, whereas Carlyle was often cynical and pessimistic. I needed that lesson then. In my first efforts for reform I was liable to be faultfinding, to emphasize the error more than the truth, and under strong excitement was disposed to ridicule and be sarcastic. My speech was too often more in the spirit of Carlyle than of Emerson — perhaps influenced more by the law thundered from Sinai than by the spirit of the Christ. I went fishing for men as Mr. Beecher once said some ministers did. It was as if a fisherman with a good outfit, hook, line and bait, should go along the bank of the stream or pond and thrash the water with his rod, crying "Bite or be damned." The great apostle's

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

advice was: "Speak the truth in *love*." It is possible to speak the truth in the spirit of Satan. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Dr. William G. Eliot once said to me: "I think we should read that saying of Jesus with the emphasis on *so*." That is, let your light shine in such a spirit and manner as will show more of God's truth and love. I had a fine illustration to the point a year after that lesson from Bryant. I was preaching in Mattoon, Illinois, and Mr. Emerson filled the pulpit for me one Sunday. His subject was "Immortality." All who heard him praised the discourse, because, of course, none of us wanted to be thought unable to understand the great man. There was a little six-year-old girl there who joined the chorus of praise. Her grown sister expressed surprise, saying: "Why, child, what do you know about that sermon? You couldn't understand a word of it." To which the little sister made quick reply: "Suppose I didn't understand the words, I knew the sermon was good; for I could see it in his face."

When excited and moved with indignation at wrong, I have often felt rebuked by the memory

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

of the following words of Charles G. Ames in his "charge" when I was ordained. He said: "Take heed to your spirit and temper, that you *speake the truth only in love*. The hour cometh when looking in the Master's eye of tender, awful goodness, you shall judge it better to have spoken three words in charity than three thousand words in disdainful sharpness of wit." The longer I live the more I feel the need of pity rather than blame for the erring and sinful.

I spent three months at Princeton and then went back to my own country. The change was a hard trial for both my wife and me. I resigned at Princeton in the face of the unanimous protest of the members of the society and also in opposition to the wish of some dear friends like Robert Collyer. Indeed it seemed a foolish move to most of my friends to give up a good salary and pleasant post and come to a region where I must serve without salary and struggle with poverty. But God and my wife and my sorely troubled mother knew why I felt this to be the loudest call on earth to me. Aside from the call to general mission work, there were strong reasons then why I should be near my distressed mother, who the doctors said

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

could remain but a little longer in that body of pain. She had grieved because of my absence for three years at Meadville, and now she begged that her eldest son would stay with her to the last and be a sort of guardian to her younger children when she was called away. No wonder some dear Unitarian friends were much disappointed, if not vexed, to have me leave such a position as I had in Princeton for this unpromising field. They did not know all the cause, and I did not feel at liberty to tell it then. My mother and brothers and sisters helped me all they could. They persuaded my father to let me have a little patch of ground to cultivate, and on which Mrs. Douthit could raise chickens and turkeys. I built a shanty which we afterwards used as a hen-house and camped in it until my brothers helped me build a house of three rooms, where we lived from 1869 to 1875, when we moved to Shelbyville. Here we lived in a little old house till the Honorable George Partridge, of St. Louis, joined with friends in Shelbyville in helping us to buy the brick parsonage by the church. There was left to us by some of those who took shares in this house, a debt of twelve hundred dollars unpaid and secured by mortgage. This pressed

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

heavily on us when I was in the midst of my anti-saloon crusade and my salary was cut down. It was then that the late Mrs. Helen M. Gougar, a most heroic and eloquent temperance reformer, was called to plead for home protection in Shelbyville. She learned of the mortgage on our house, and our pinch, and quietly went to work, and with the assistance of local friends and others at a distance she gave my wife and me the greatest surprise of our lives — a warranty deed to the house free of all incumbrances. I mention this fact because of an erroneous impression abroad, that my wife and I got into debt and so got that mortgage on the house. We did not. We only assumed the debt that other shareholders incurred and failed to pay. But we did mortgage this house later in the effort to found Lithia Springs Chautauqua.

VII

My mission work began in the old "Hardshell" Baptist meeting-house, later called the Log Church, where my mother had taken me when I was a babe, and held me in her lap during the long services — the sermon often being two hours long. It was in the midst of a district that had always been destitute of any other church privileges. For many miles around there were no other churches excepting in Shelbyville, five miles away.

The Predestinarian or "Hardshell" Baptists were the first people who held religious services in that region. Their theology was Calvinism gone to seed. They taught that God had decreed from the foundation of the world a fixed number who were to be saved and a fixed number who were to be cast into Hell forever, without any regard to good or bad works. Man had no will of his own. Hence to make any effort to improve or reform or train children in the way they should go was

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

folly, if not blasphemy. The only thing to do was to sit still or drift, and let God do it all.

I state this old Baptist doctrine just as I understood it when I was a boy. I did not believe it, but I believed in my mother. My mother and grandmother planted Bible seeds in my mind and heart that choked out the doctrine of the preachers. It has been one of the chief regrets of my life that I was not made more familiar with the Bible in my early youth so that I could quote it easily. It would have been a great advantage to me among the people for whom I have labored. I once asked Ralph Waldo Emerson how he would convince these people of the sin and evil of slavery and strong drink, especially when they hold to the Bible's infallibility and quoted scripture in support of slavery. He replied promptly: "I would quote the same authority against slavery, because *to them* it is the highest." I did this with excellent effect.

The do-nothing doctrine of the "Hardshell" Baptists caused them to vehemently oppose all missionary efforts, Sunday-schools and temperance reform and an educated ministry. All that saved my mother's children, so far as I can see, was the fact that she did not practise

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the "don't care" doctrine with her children, but, by constant precept and example, taught us to be good and do good. She and my father were ever saying to their children, "Whatever you do, you must always speak the truth, be honest with everybody, and go to meeting (church) and behave."

It would hardly be just for me to omit saying that while my Calvinistic forefathers held to doctrines and practised customs which in the light of the present day I believe to be wrong, yet they were thoroughly sincere in their faith. "I would rather you would differ from me, if you must in order to be honest, than to pretend to believe what you do not." Thus my grandfather would often say to me. They were more true to the light God gave them than some of their descendants who claim greater and better light. These Baptists called a member who was strong in the faith "hard," which meant sternly orthodox; and a member that was disposed to be liberal they called "soft." My mother was reckoned as "soft." When I first told her with joy that I had found a people who would take me in and ordain me to preach the gospel, she asked, "What do they believe?" When I told her, as nearly as I could, she exclaimed:



MR. DOUTHIT ABOUT 1870

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

“Why, my child, that is what I always believed. I joined the Baptists because I wanted so much to belong to meeting, and there was nothing else to join.”

It was naturally decreed that a church such as I have described should die. The factions ground together like the upper and nether millstones, having no grist, till they ground themselves to pieces. Their divisions and subdivisions were endless on questions that nobody on earth knows anything about. The split that was the beginning of the end of the old church in this locality, was on what they called “the two-seed doctrine”—the seed of good and evil. One side held that God made Himself and that the Devil made himself, and each of them had a separate kingdom. The other side contended that God created Himself and the Devil also. The church split on that question, and that about ended it in that region. My mother's last pastor and a dozen or more of the churches of the Southern Illinois Baptist Association went over to the Universalists; for their good hearts made them feel that if God had decreed anything, he must have decreed that all should be saved.

It is hard to conceive of a community with

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

so great a prejudice against giving money for religious purposes as prevailed in this locality. It was taught to be especially wrong to give money for church or missionary purposes. I knew a well-to-do farmer, a good fellow in many respects, who boasted near the end of his long life that he had never given a dollar to a church or a preacher. And yet he asked me to visit him at his death-bed and I preached his funeral sermon. I had many years before been asked to pray at the death-bed of his wife. I have often paid livery hire to serve at funerals where the bereaved parties seemed to think the honor of being invited to officiate, and a "thank ye," were reward enough. I have thought so too, because it gave me a hearing among many people to whom I could never otherwise get a chance to preach.

I have known professed church people, good honest fellows as the world goes, who were supposed to possess fifty or seventy-five thousand dollars, who seemed to think they were doing generously to give ten or twenty dollars a year for the support of their faith. So much depends upon early training and the custom of the community. It requires much grace, tact and generous example to change such habits —

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

often more than I have been able to illustrate.

The following editorial appeared in the *Shelby County Union* as late as the year 1870. It illustrates the prejudice that even then prevailed against giving money for religious objects. The *Union* said:

“A few Sundays ago we witnessed the taking up of a collection in a church. It was at the session of a Sunday-school. One hundred and fifty, more or less, were present. Some shook their heads, some appeared too busily engaged to notice the hat when passed, while others dived into their pockets and made a ‘dry haul’—it may be a few tobacco crumbs. All but one lone man,—that was the minister. The boy who carried the empty hat looked at that one with something like mingled pity and dread, and then reluctantly presented the hat, and the minister was the only contributor among those one hundred and fifty poverty-stricken souls. The Superintendent of the Sunday-school had to say that the weekly distribution of Sunday-school papers must stop for want of a few dimes necessary to partly pay for the same. And yet harvests are plenty and business brisk.”

But there is a brighter sequel to that story, for the Sunday-school papers were not long discontinued. As soon as the want was made known, the Unitarian Sunday-school Society,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

gave enough copies of *The Dayspring* to gladden all the children's hearts and brighten the homes round about. Some "Hardshell" Baptist parents made their children return the papers and said they should not come to the Sunday-school if they were allowed to read anything but the Bible, but there were other parents who sent money to help pay for the "pretty little paper." I remember one pious old grandma who lived in a cabin in the deep woods and who walked one day over two miles through a snowstorm to our home on the prairie. She came to bring "two bits" (twenty-five cents), which she had wrapped carefully in a bandana handkerchief, to pay for *The Dayspring* for her grandchildren. I have been happily surprised in recent years to find files of that little paper preserved to this day as a precious treasure in some homes of this mission.

While some well-to-do people at a distance, knowing the character of the work and the need, have volunteered aid and seemed happy to do so again and again, yet in this vicinity it has been wage workers and persons of little means who as a rule have been the most cheerful and generous co-workers in the mission.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Many have been the times in my extremity that some of the poorest in this world's goods have caused me to thank God and take courage for renewed efforts. They have helped with their own hands to build meeting-houses, to build the tabernacle and library chapel at Lithia, and to dig down hills and make roads in the park. In many instances they have given a share of their wages to support the Chautauqua.

For example, while I write this story, a young man comes to say, "I will give half my wages for a month to help support the Chautauqua for 1908." A hired girl, on learning that the Chautauqua might not be held next year for want of funds, says: "I will give \$10 of my wages rather than not have it go on." A poor man and an excellent helper in Chautauqua work, whose home is fifty miles away, says: "I have heard that you are having a hard tug to continue the Chautauqua. I will help you all I can free of charge. I am going to rally a company to come over and help you this year for the love of it." A poor tenant farmer who has a family and a hard struggle to make ends meet comes to say: "There are several of us fellows who can't give much, but we will give ten dollars apiece to help out the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Chautauqua, because it is doing our folks so much good."

Several times in the history of this mission, when, for want of support, I was on the eve of answering a louder call, some of the poor people of my parish, without knowing that I had decided to leave, have come to the rescue. For instance, once while we lived in the little home on the prairie, my wife and I were ready to give up, but just then there came a poor farmer in a two-horse wagon with a load of chickens, sacks of flour, potatoes, and other family necessities and said: "I know you must be having a hard scrabble to get along, but I do hope you will stick by us, for we cannot do without you."

Another time, in Shelbyville, I had written my resignation when one of the poorest families of my congregation did an act which moved the hearts of those in better circumstances to make me feel obliged to reconsider my decision.

I will relate one very singular experience. It was during one of the darkest hours in our battle at Lithia. It seemed that we must give up and surrender our home and everything but honor. We were at the bottom of the meal tub, and my wife and I had determined to live

on spare diet rather than incur more debt. In that critical hour, there came to our door one dark night a woman of a popular church, a woman who had the name of being stingy and whose husband I had tried hard to rescue from drink. This widow did not know of our want. She called my wife and said: "The Lord has been telling me all day that before I slept I must come and give you some money. I don't know why it is so, but I can't sleep till I have given you this; but you must never mention my name to anyone but your husband." Then she said "Good-night." She had given my wife twenty-five dollars. In less than a month after that event some Unitarian friends helped us to push the battle at Lithia for another year. By such seemingly special providences we were kept in the battle.

But I must go back to the early days of the mission. One Sunday afternoon in the Log Church — after two of the Baptist preachers had preached an hour and a half or two hours each, and had denounced Sunday-schools and new-fangled college preachers, I arose, and announced a meeting the next Sunday for the organization of a Sunday-school. The novel announcement created a sensation; and there was

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

a crowd on hand, mostly children of laborers working on the railroad, now the Big Four. We had a big Sunday-school. Then my wife started a subscription school, and had a house full, the greater number being Irish-Catholic children. I held meetings every night for several weeks. The old house was crammed and jammed, running over with people. But it could stand the pressure. It was built of hewn logs of big trees, and had enough timber in it to make half a dozen houses of its size.

The crowd that gathered at the Sunday-school hour did not all come from religious motives. Sometimes a few of them came to settle quarrels that had begun at a dance or at the races. It was not a very great novelty to have a fight in the yard or the road with knives and pistols. Once in Sunday-school, while I was expounding the Beatitudes, a rough man who was fired with drink, rose and said, "That's all a —— lie." He further said he had come there to whip the abolition preacher, and he was going to do it right away. The fellow was angry with me, because, knowing of the distress of his family, I had warned saloon keepers that I would prosecute them if they let him have liquor. He had come to take vengeance

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

upon me. A half dozen boys remonstrated with him, and when he persisted in his determination and rushed for the pulpit, it became necessary to deal with him less gently. In spite of his struggles, the boys succeeded in taking him bodily and placing him on the back of his horse, and, on promise of good behavior, he was permitted to go his way. Then we called back into the house the scared and scattered women and children, for there was only one adult man there, and all sang with spirit and understanding a rousing temperance song.

My wife and I lived at first in a little shanty, about ten by twelve. We tried to live on what she earned by teaching and what I could raise by cultivating a little farm. The whole community, except the Catholics, were "dead set" against paying a preacher anything. A foreigner, however, who became a regular attendant at my meetings, came to me one day and said, "I don't see how you live without pay. Come down to my house and I will give you a little sweetening to help you along." He gave me a big jug of sorghum molasses. That was my first year's salary and my first pay as preacher in that mission. The next year the same man paid me five dollars, this being the first

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

money I received as salary from the people to whom I was preaching. This man was not noted for his generosity, but he had been trained to give for the support of the gospel. Then an old fellow who hailed from Nova Scotia, and who was inclined to scoff at the church, said: "I find that since these preaching services have begun my chickens have not been stolen so much, and life and limb are safer. I for one am willing to chip in to help keep the thing a-going."

And so he headed a subscription, and went with it to Shelbyville, five miles away. Thus my third year's salary was increased to about fifty dollars, although my wife made much more by raising chickens and turkeys than I did by preaching.

VIII

In the first years of my work at the Log Church, 1867 and 1868, I began to preach in Mattoon. At first the Methodist and Cumberland Presbyterian churches were kindly opened to me; and then the public halls. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Concord sage, gave me a labor of love in Union Hall, on Sunday, Dec. 15, 1868, and on the following Sunday, Dec. 22 — Forefathers' Day — Unity Church of Liberal Christians was organized in Mattoon.

I also preached at the school-houses round about, tried to cultivate a little farm of twenty acres, and edited a department in the *Shelbyville Union*, called "The Preaching Corner." This was, of course, purely a labor of love, but it required the best of two days of each week for preparing copy, reading proof and going, on foot or horseback, to and from Shelbyville.

I started also to build a new chapel in my

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

own district and the following letter to my brother tells how it was done:

“April 17th, 1870.

“*Dear Brother George,—*

“I am overwhelmed with work. Is that news to you? This morning I awoke at two o'clock, and the more I thought of what there is to do to-day the more I couldn't sleep. Most that presses now to be done is for other folks and *pro bono publico*. I find the Chapel, Oak Grove, will go unfinished another summer (the enterprise had lagged through one summer) unless I drop all and go right to work at it. Hence it comes to pass that I strike out as soon as daylight to hire a plasterer, see that the mortar is mixed, etc., etc. I expect to go right on and foot the bill myself, if I can sell anything; and when it is ready I'll send for Collyer to dedicate it and then ask the assembled people to pay for *their* church, and if they don't do it, I will resign in a farewell discourse, give them my private opinion of a people who appreciate the gospel enough to permit a preacher to build a church and pay for the privilege of preaching in it. *I am in earnest.*”

This Oak Grove Chapel stood within a few feet of the spot where our primitive log school house stood sixty-eight years ago. There we

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

little boys with nothing to wear but coarse, home-spun tow shirts, a single garment, hanging below the knees like the children's night-gowns now, first went to school, and said over and over again every day for six months, our A B C's. About a mile from the same place I taught my first subscription school when I was eighteen years old. Robert Collyer came down from Chicago to the dedication of this chapel. It was a novel occasion — the first of the kind in that region. I will let him tell of this, his first visit to the mission. The following is an extract from a report he gave to *The Liberal Christian*, a weekly paper edited by Dr. Bellows, published in New York City:

“Jasper L. Douthit's new church in Shelby County, Illinois, was dedicated on Thursday, the 29th of September, 1870. It was a beautiful and touching sight to me altogether. The church is called the Oak Grove Church. It is in the center of a noble piece of woodland, buried so deep there that they have had to cut a road two miles long through the timber on one side, and another a little shorter in another direction. But the place is central in the thinly-settled region over which Mr. Douthit has the care of souls. It is also close to the secluded cemetery of the countryside — a sweet spot as

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ever the sun shone upon — silent above ground almost as below. The church itself is a nice, seemly structure of the meeting-house order of architecture. The seats and pulpit are of black walnut, rough but solid. The whole thing is home-made; that is, by Mr. Douthit and the rough-and-ready farmers and others interested in the movement, together with the help of a devoted carpenter, who gave a great deal of his labor. Contributions of work and money have been made by members of almost all the churches in that region, by Jews also, and a few outsiders. It fell to my lot to preach the dedication sermon. A Lutheran minister read, 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them,' and offered the prayer. They listen down in 'Egypt' to the preaching as if it did them good. I left the manuscript in the saddle bags and ventured to speak without it. Said very little about points of difference and all I could about the great things all Christians hold in common. They have the quaint old Quaker fashion down there of sitting separately — the men on the one side, and the women on the other. The women wore sunbonnets, and some of the men were without their coats. Rustic all of them and rough, but good to look at,—very. Mr. Douthit had one great load on his mind — the lifting of the debt. It was only about two hundred dollars, but it was appalling to him because they had all done what they could who had the thing at heart. He told me afterwards,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

with a solemn face, that if it hadn't been paid he had made up his mind to sell his only mare. Mr. Douthit made a most effective address at the close of the sermon, and told the people what he wanted them to do. There was a little spurt of generosity, then a pause, as when a ship about to be launched slides almost down to the water and then will go no further; but we put our shoulders to it and started afresh; got warm to the work; went through the whole congregation, one by one, and ended by getting almost half as much again as was wanted, making the minister about as happy as a minister can be.

“I can hardly tell how much good Mr. Douthit has done in that region. It is to me simply wonderful. Religious men and women of other persuasions join with him and help in the singing and prayer. His brothers, splendid, stalwart fellows, are on his side, and maintain his cause. He goes to Mattoon once a month when he is strong enough, and has a small hearing there; writes a religious column for one of the papers, and has a small farm besides, but I doubt whether he is much of a farmer, and small blame to him. Is it worth my while to say that his best helper and inspirer after God, is his wife, a small slender woman from Abington, in Massachusetts, who is proud and glad in her quiet way, of the good work. She works herself, also, I fear beyond her strength, but does not seem to know it; a poet and a thinker, doing her own housework, a

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

woman's work on a farm, caring for her little brood of children, and almost not regretting that she is five or six hundred miles from a mountain and eight or nine hundred from the sea."

So much for Robert Collyer's report. It was Mr. Collyer's eloquence and running fire of drollery and happy anecdotes that completely captured the crowd. At first some persons left the house with a grumble. This provoked Collyer to a witty comment which I cannot recall, but to the effect that it did not disturb him for little children to run out of church while he talked, but grown folks ought to have learned to behave better when a stranger came to do them good. Then some sang and others laughed, and the grumbling fellows returned to see what was up. There was soon a broad smile on their faces and they shoved their hands into their pockets and "shelled out" their loose change. I remember one dear old woman who wore a frilled cap with a sunbonnet over it. I had known her for a lifetime, but had never known her to give a cent for any such thing. She looked glum and cross when Mr. Collyer began his plea, but soon she smiled and pulled out of her pocket a little bag of silver and



OAK GROVE CHAPEL

With one of the oldest burying-grounds in that part of the country



FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, SHELBYVILLE

Dedicated May 8, 1876

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

emptied it in the collection. Blessed be her memory!

Not long after that I was offered the appointment under President Grant's administration to an Indian Agency, which I declined, and most of my friends thought I was foolish to do so, just as they thought when I declined the post-office under Lincoln.

On my birthday, Monday morning, October 10, 1870, I wrote my brother George who was at Antioch College:

"My Dear Brother,—

"I want you to help me. Since Collyer was with me and is gone I feel even more lonely than before. Perhaps the excitement and wear and tear were too much for me. At any rate I have had a low, sad time for a week or more, and like Elijah under the Juniper tree, I have placed my face on the earth and asked the Lord to let me die and go where the wicked trouble us no more and the weary are at rest. Of course, I know this is not the right spirit, even while I can't feel differently. 'O God, be pitiful!' I would write to you about our dedication, but that I was surfeited with it and the troubles it brought, and do not want to think about it much. We had trouble with the —— family again about it. They didn't want Collyer to preach the dedication sermon at all unless he would preach

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

it on Sunday, and voted against it, although a large majority voted for him to come as he did. The day appointed it rained and we postponed till next day. Collyer gave a most rousing talk that made eyes water with mirth and sorrow alternately, and when we asked for help to clear the church of debt we got by pledges on paper two hundred and ninety-five dollars! A most miraculous draught! It will pay the debt wholly and partly pay for a bell for the chapel. I never beheld such generosity before. Only three persons in the congregation said no! The others seemed glad to give because Robert Collyer asked them. I long for the days when you will be with me; but still I pray you press on at Antioch and graduate. Write letters to your brothers and sisters exhorting them to fidelity and to be good Christians. Why don't you have the *Index* sent direct to you and save me the trouble of mailing? Pardon me for saying that I think it is not just the thing which *you* need to read. You had better by far read Beecher's Lecture Room Talks, etc. Write me a good long letter. May God bless you.

“ Affectionately,

“ JASPER.”

“ P. S.— This is my birthday. I am 36 years old and some wiser if no better. Give my love to Dr. Hosmer and tell him I often think of him.”

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

In my diary of Thursday, Jan. 5th, 1871, appears this entry:

“ Elder Ellis closed his labors with us Monday night. He presented a subscription at the close of meeting for my support for the year 1871. Mostly young folks were present. They came up with remarkable alacrity and put down their names, for from one to ten dollars — only three of the latter. It amounted to sixty-two dollars on paper, on the spot, and most of the members of the society, strange to say, were absent. In fact this was subscribed largely by those who gave nothing last year. Ellis talked to them very plainly. Said he, ‘ I am his (Jasper’s) bishop and *he shall go away from here* if you don’t support him better than you have done.’ ”

IX

I remember that for the first twenty or twenty-five years of my life there were no funeral services whatever at the burial of the dead, not even a hymn or prayer, throughout the country in which I was reared and began preaching. It was the custom to have a funeral preached some months or years *after* the death. Then the preacher made no reference to the dead but a long harangue mostly of scripture quotations to prove his pet doctrine and comfort the elect. I recall nothing tender and uplifting that was spoken on such occasions, and yet there was something in the deep sincerity of the preacher and the general spirit of the service that struck me with awe and made me want to be good. This custom of no service at funerals shocked new-comers. I have heard Yankees and Irish-Catholics exclaim: "What a queer people these! They bury their dead as if they were no more than dogs!" But now for many years I have not known any people in all this country so "queer" as not to have a funeral

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

service at the burial; so that even those who habitually neglect the church and lead godless lives never bury one of their family without calling a minister to officiate.

I have said I never witnessed a funeral service at a burial till I was over twenty years old. It was on the death of the husband of my father's sister. While his body lay in the coffin at their home and the mourners had gathered to follow it to the grave, my aunt begged me to read some comforting scripture and make a prayer. But after that first service at my uncle's death to this present time I have ministered at the burial of all my uncles and aunts, in this vicinity, and nearly all my relatives in this locality on my father's side, who have passed away; and there are dozens of these laid side by side here since fifty years ago. When grandfather Douthit passed, Elder John Ellis assisted me in the service. When my mother went in August, 1871, aged fifty-seven, my young brother George assisted me with a most uplifting hymn.

Two years after my mother's death, my brother George himself joined "the Choir Invisible." Then I must alone endeavor to speak comforting words to the weeping crowd in Oak Grove Chapel, where he had helped me so effect-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ively. That was, at the time, the sorest cross of my life. I could not feel that it was right for one to go who was so young, so stalwart physically and so helpful and full of promise as co-worker with me in the ministry.

George Douthit was a manly man. His body was large and tall, weighing nearly two hundred pounds, with a fine face, and most like, so my mother used to say, his father when young and before the dread custom of the times had changed him. He had a charming musical voice. He was the picture of health, and seemed destined for long life. He was cheerful, full of humor and good spirits, fond of manly exercise, and, withal, of most serious purpose. He felt called to help me in the ministry and did help wonderfully. But he presumed too much on his strong constitution. He overworked and unwisely exposed himself. He returned from Antioch, after a year of hard study, and worked through a heated term in the harvest field. He was prostrated with malarial fever and when slightly recovered he attended crowded meetings of nights in badly ventilated and over-heated rooms.

I want to tell a great deal about my brother

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

George in this story, because he has been near me and a co-worker in this mission as effectively since what we call his death as before that event. "For are they not all ministering spirits?" The story of my life work would be sadly lacking without this testimony of what his life on earth and in heaven has helped me to be and do.

I cannot now sing well enough to be heard in public; and I could scarcely distinguish "Yankee Doodle" from "Old Hundred" till I heard brother George sing. The last time he was with me in a public meeting before he passed up higher, he sang with such marvelous power the old hymn: "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah," that it seemed as if a holy contagion swept through the entire audience; and a little while after, to my great surprise, I was singing that hymn as I had never sung before in my life, though I had learned printed notes in music and tried in vain for many years to sing.

I am convinced there is infinitely more music to be learned by contact with hearts and souls inspired of God than by all the training of experts with printed notes or vocal culture. "Nearer my God to Thee" was sung by my

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

brother George at Log Church the first time it was heard in this part of the country. He had learned it at Antioch College.

George was one of the little band of eight persons who united in organizing the first Unitarian church in southern Illinois, namely, the Oak Grove Church of Liberal Christians. When he heard the history of my early struggles and my failure to get to Antioch College, he was ambitious to gain a victory over that failure. He would go to Antioch anyhow, graduate and come back and help me win other victories from defeat. He did go, for three years. Meantime, as was revealed after his death, he bequeathed the little estate he possessed to be used for the education of my children, so deeply interested was he in my work.

Not only in this mission was his death greatly mourned, but his teachers and fellow students at Antioch College felt his loss keenly. They had all grown strongly attached to him, and were deeply impressed with his life among them, so much so that Doctor George W. Hosmer, the President of the College, was moved to come and preach a sermon in his memory a few months after the burial.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I cannot forbear transcribing some extracts from a letter written at the time of my brother's death by President Hosmer to the *Liberal Christian*. This letter was dated February 10, 1873. It reads as follows:

“Just now we are mourning the loss of George W. Douthit, the brother of our missionary minister in southern Illinois. Mr. Douthit was twenty-four years old, a member of our Sophomore class, a superior scholar, and a noble young man. He died at his home in Illinois. Let me tell you of this family and its home.

“Southern Illinois, you know, was Egypt, because so dark with ignorance, intemperance, and the love and defense of slavery. In that darkness these young men, our devoted minister, Jasper, and this lamented George and other brothers and sisters were born. Jasper was the eldest, and in his early youth he rose up in protest against the life about him; he was for anti-slavery, for temperance, for education, and for free liberal Christianity. The community was incensed against him, violence was threatened; but he stood calm and determined. Pressed by such difficulties and dangers even, he heard there was to be a Conference of Liberal Christians at Detroit. I remember him as he appeared there, looking as Abraham Lincoln would have looked at his age. He touched our hearts, he con-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

vinced our reason, and we gave him the right hand of fellowship, and helped him go to Meadville to prepare for the ministry.

“When Jasper was prepared, by three years at Meadville school, he would go nowhere else but back to his old battlefield in Illinois, though earnestly invited to easier fields of labor, and he returned in solemn purpose to do what he could to scatter that darkness. And there he has been for some years, enduring hardness that Paul would praise. He is near his old home amidst those who, twelve years ago, threatened him with violence, and his sphere is an area of fifteen to twenty miles; he has four preaching stations, and is giving himself in all helpful ways to the people around him. I think we have no such Christian ministry as his.

“George, whose death we mourn, rose up in the light of Jasper's life. Quickened, inspired and aided, he came here for education to prepare himself for usefulness in helping Jasper. He has distinguished himself here, showing large ability and fine intuition. Always grave, earnest and manly, he prompted his fellow students to true, noble life.

“Just before leaving here, Mr. Douthit read a paper of rare pith and force before his Literary Society. The last time he was with his associates, it became known that he was to leave for a time, and some of the younger members, with an unreasonable levity, called upon Mr. Douthit for a song. With a quiet dignity he

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

rose, and uttering a Methodist farewell song or hymn, to suit his circumstances and feelings, he sang it through, filling eyes not used to weeping with tears, and awakening thoughts of tender solemnities in those not often reached by religious appeals."

The visit of Dr. Hosmer and the memorial service proved one of the most memorable occasions in the history of this mission. The venerable president was a most impressive personality to look upon. He was large, dignified and manly, with silver locks and a face beaming with smiles. My father thought Dr. Hosmer preached the greatest sermon he ever heard. It moved all hearts. It was a beautiful tribute to the memory of one whose brief life had seemingly moved more souls to think of God and eternal life than many who stay on earth more than three times as many years.

While visiting me on this occasion, President Hosmer wrote again to the *Liberal Christian*, of June 7th, 1873, giving his impression as follows:

"Here I am, this charming summer day, in southern Illinois, in Brother Douthit's best room, in the quiet country, a beautiful grove round the simple house, the wild flowers bloom-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ing, and the birds singing, making the morning joyful. This room has a large case of some of the best books usually seen in a minister's library. There are four large portraits upon the wall, each finely significant — Dr. Channing's, Theodore Parker's, Robert Collyer's, and one of George Douthit, the brother of our friend Jasper, a very superior young man, a student of Antioch College, who died last winter. We all loved and highly valued him, and the college sends me to sympathize with the bereaved neighborhood and bear testimony to the worth of the promising young man. I wish our whole denomination could see the modest home of their missionary and his field of work. His house, built by his own hands, with the help of the brothers, would hold a small part of our Israel at a time, and the intrusion would be serious to most housekeepers; but Mrs. Douthit, who was a Massachusetts woman and not a stranger to books and Muses, with a calm, sweet dignity, would not be disturbed. We really have an Oberlin here in southern Illinois. Brother Douthit strives to supply the spiritual wants of the people anywhere within six or seven or ten miles. He has four principal preaching stations; and by his large, catholic spirit and fine, sharp thought, he is winning hearers and fellow workers; and a great enlightenment already appears. People are collected for worship; schools are better managed and more cared for.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

“The work Mr. Douthit is doing here is hard,—to many it would seem repulsive,—and very poorly compensated; he could not live but for his few acres of land and his garden. These farmers, many of them, having had no relations with any church for years, have no habit of giving and are surprised with themselves when Mr. Douthit's unselfishness and real, useful service wins gifts from them. But the work is interesting; it shows the only way of uplifting these wide-spreading farming communities of the West.”

Sometimes, when cast down and feeling keenly my personal shortcomings and failure to accomplish what I have attempted, I have been cheered by the thought that if this mission has been the means under God of saving that one brother from ruin, and making his brief life such a power for good, the mission has been worth more than it has cost. And, so far as God gives me to see, the lives of scores of young people whom I knew forty or fifty years ago would have been blasted, as many before them had been, but for just such influences as God sent through this Unitarian mission.

In a remote part of the county some twelve miles from Shelbyville, about a mile from a little village called Mode and beside one of the oldest

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

graveyards in the county, there was a little log school-house. I preached there for some time, and the house became too small for our meetings. Then the farmers said they would join hands and build a new meeting-house and call it Union Church, to be free to all denominations when not occupied by the Unitarians. The house was built to seat some three or four hundred people, and everybody said that Robert Collyer must come and dedicate it. They had read and heard of his being at Oak Grove Chapel. Mr. Collyer came and when he arrived he said he had gotten farther into the real Egypt than he had ever been before; for it was a sort of wilderness place.

The following report of the dedication service was made by the *Shelbyville Union*:

“Last Sunday, the 13th of July, 1873, was the day set apart for the dedication of a new church just completed near Mode, in this county, and twelve miles southeast of this city. In the service the Unitarian, Christian, Methodist and Presbyterian sects were represented. An excellent choir had been extemporized by Prof. J. C. Smith, of Marshall, Clark County, who had also the aid of a sweet-toned instrument. About six hundred dollars in money was to be raised, to leave the house free from debt. It was up-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

hill work. Mr. Collyer said that one sad sign of the need of a church in that community was the apparent indifference on the part of some persons in the immediate vicinity. Many persons gave beyond their ability. For example: it was enough to bring tears to a stingy man's eyes to see old Uncle Jacob Elliott come forward holding out a handful of money in addition to the generous contributions of money, timber and land he had already given. He is one of the oldest settlers of Shelby County and truly one of nature's noblemen. And his wife is equal to her worthy husband. Everybody had a free invitation to go to Uncle Jacob's crib and help himself to oats and corn for his beasts and to eat a lunch with him. The name of Jacob Elliott will go down to a grateful posterity, while the men who live in splendid mansions and refused to give anything will be forgotten. Uncle Jacob lives in an old log house of but two rooms."

It was during this visit for the dedication at Mode that Mr. Collyer learned the story of John Oliver Reed's remarkable conversion. A while before this visit of Mr. Collyer, this man had told his religious experience in a heart-searching speech to a wondering crowd at a meeting at Oak Grove Chapel. My wife and I took notes of that speech, and reported to Mr. Collyer when he came. He made a sermon

story of it to his congregation in Chicago, and it was published in the daily papers. Then the American Unitarian Association printed it in tract form, and it was reprinted in England and translated into Welsh. Thousands of copies have been and are still being circulated in America and in other countries. The tract is entitled "A Story of the Prairie." It is true to facts in every particular. John was my cousin, the son of my father's sister, and after his conversion he told how once, while I was taking the enrollment for the draft, he went to one of my Sunday services with a pistol in his pocket, resolved to shoot me if I preached what he had heard I was in the habit of preaching; but during the opening prayer he gave up the resolve; and was troubled in conscience till the great light and wonderful peace came to him.

In those early days I made appointments at various school-houses, and nearly always had good congregations. Much of the time, having no other way of getting there, I walked through mud or snow or sleet. The last long walk made on Sunday morning to fill an appointment was twelve miles through the snow. There was just one family at meeting that stormy morning, and they were not members of



MR. DOUTHIT AND HIS SONS ROBERT AND GEORGE

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the church. They afterwards became zealous members of the Free Methodist church, but were always my faithful friends. The father helped me to buy one of the first printing presses used in the mission; and his daughter was married at the Unitarian parsonage and went to Africa as a missionary, and died there.

During this period Elder John Ellis, of Yellow Springs, Ohio, a liberal evangelist of the "Christian Connection," gave valuable assistance in my work. Elder Ellis was one of the early trustees of Antioch College and he was at one time editor of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, published at Dayton, Ohio, said to be the oldest religious weekly published in the United States. But he was mostly a pilgrim preacher, walking to his appointments, much of the time, with staff in hand, till he dropped suddenly.

Brother Ellis was powerful in song and prayer. He was the author of the once popular song in the West, called "The White Pilgrim," and he could sing it most impressively. He became interested in my work in the year 1868, and from that time to the close of the first protracted meeting in the court-house, March, 1876, he was frequently with me. He helped

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in the gathering of congregations at Oak Grove, Mode, Sylvan and other points in the county. He died a few years ago at the age of eighty. His wife, a physician and relative of General W. T. Sherman, published her husband's autobiography, in which he speaks only too kindly of me and my labors. At one time in the first years of the work in Shelbyville, Mrs. Ellis had a class of over fifty young women in Unity Sunday-school who were mostly hired girls in the homes of the town.

During the years of my preaching at Oak Grove, Mode, Sylvan, Mt. Carmel and the old court-house, and in the early meetings at Lithia Springs, Jacob Smith, a popular singing-school teacher, gave me valuable assistance. He was an elder in the Presbyterian church at Marshall, Illinois, but was a most loyal friend. He sang with his whole soul and taught others to sing in my meetings from the time we first met, about 1869, till the Father called him home.

X

In 1874 I was jaded in body and hedged in by poverty. The way to continue the work was hidden. My mother had died and I was not needed at home for her sake. Brother George had gone. I was tempted to give up; but some friends urged me to go to the National Unitarian Conference in Saratoga, New York, and make a speech. My wife said I was not fit to go alone. Our four children were quite small. The youngest child, our Christmas gift, three years old, seemed too little to leave. However, it was decided to leave all with friends and go. I thought it would probably be the only and last opportunity I would have to testify to a Unitarian Conference of what was nearest my heart. People had told me that Unitarianism was only for the "highly cultured," and that I was wasting my life where the field was not ready for our gospel. I really felt that if this were true, I

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

could not call myself a Unitarian, but before I discarded the name, I would clear my conscience with some last words to the Unitarian body. Moreover, I was encouraged on learning that distinguished Unitarians like Doctors Edward E. Hale, Henry W. Bellows, Rush R. Shippen and Robert Collyer had determined to make a forward move for missionary work.

So I accepted the invitation to speak at the National Conference and Mrs. Douthit went with me. The missionary meeting was held on Thursday evening, September 17, and Judge E. Rockwood Hoar presided. One of the speakers was Rev. Thos. L. Eliot, of Portland, Oregon, who was most eloquent for aggressive work.

From the rapturous applause his address received, I began to think that the main body of Unitarians was alive for the gospel to all people. I was glad, though I trembled, to be called to follow Dr. Eliot. The following is the synopsis of my speech as reported at that time in the *Christian Register*:

“We ought to have learned from higher authority than Prof. Max Mueller that Christianity is a missionary religion. The command of its great founder was, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel.’ To preach the gospel

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in Christ's mind was to live the gospel. Christianity is not merely giving wise advice, not going half way, but the whole way, to save men from sin. The Holy Spirit blows everywhere for the salvation of men. The leaven of the Kingdom of God leavens the whole, not half, of humanity. If Unitarianism does not mean that a Christian is a missionary by nature, if it does not mean to convert the world to Christianity, then we had better give up the Christian name and no longer dishonor it. What shall we do? Shall we scatter our literature? Yes; but let us send men as missionaries with the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It is a great joy to me that this denomination has concluded not to spend its force in grinding upon itself, but that it is to show a more missionary spirit. We need more spiritual force. We need, as Dr. Hedge has said, 'morality with the divine emphasis.' Where the will of God fills the heart, it finds the way to other hearts. It is the individual, personal sympathy that moves men. Warm sympathy is what most people crave. And for the want of it amongst us, many remain in false ecclesiastical relations who would otherwise join with us in the army of progress. On the line of progress in holiness and love let us move onward. Let us obey the laws of God, which are the laws of progress."

Dr. Henry W. Bellows, of New York, the beloved President of the National Sanitary

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Commission for the armies of the Union in the Civil War, followed me with one of his most inspiring addresses. "Dr. Bellows never spoke with greater power," so the *Christian Register* reported; and that was saying much of the most eloquent preacher then among the Unitarians. "The meeting was exceedingly enthusiastic," continues the *Register's* report. "Brothers Eliot and Douthit received the warmest welcome that warm-hearted people could give. They are the embodiment of the true missionary spirit."

At the close of the meeting Judge Hoar, the chairman, was the first to thank me for my address. Then followed scores to shake hands and express sympathy. I was surprised beyond expression, and my wife was still more surprised, "for," said she, "I have heard you preach better often when nobody thanked you."

The hour was late; but after the speaking, Rev. Rush R. Shippen, Secretary of the Conference, presented the following resolution:

"*Resolved*; That we give to Brothers Eliot and Douthit our hearty sympathy and God-speed in their arduous labors in difficult places of our work, and that we promise them sustenance and sympathy forever."

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

The resolution was emphatically approved by a standing vote of that audience of several thousand wide-awake Unitarians. That great multitude of bright, cheering faces was about the most inspiring scene I ever beheld. It seems as if it would never fade from my memory.

The following editorial comment appeared in the *Christian Register* of Sept. 26, 1874, Rev. Thomas J. Mumford, Editor:

“The best meeting at the Saratoga Conference was on Thursday evening, when in addition to the other excellent addresses Messrs. Eliot of Oregon, and Douthit of Illinois, made the most telling speeches of the kind to which we have ever listened. The earnestness, simplicity and modest unconsciousness of these noble men, fresh from their outposts, thrilled the whole assembly, and if the representatives of our churches had felt authorized to make large pledges, the hoped-for \$100,000 could have been raised on the spot. Many laymen said substantially: ‘If this is the work that can be done in our country, and such men as these can be found to do it, it is time for us to close our skeptical mouths and open our unbelieving pocket-books very wide in response to the appeal of the Unitarian Association.’ Many clergymen also heard and we trust heeded the voice of that memorable hour which called them

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

to renewed consecration and increased sacrifice in the work of the ministry. There is nothing so potent in its influence, or so searching in its suggestions, as the presence of faithful men who have endured hardness without the least whimpering or boastfulness. It puts to shame all our ordinary devotion and average fidelity. Messrs. Eliot and Douthit must return to their isolated positions cheered and strengthened by such cordial manifestations of the confidence, honor and love of their communion."

Ex-Governor John D. Long, of Massachusetts, later Secretary of the Navy in President McKinley's cabinet, in an article in the March, 1875, number of the *Unitarian Review*, Boston, has this bit of description:

"At the recent National Conference at Saratoga, where, with the few usual exceptions which prove the rule, everybody was brilliant and fervid and kindling; where some denominational questions were argued with rare eloquence; where orators spoke, unsurpassed in graceful persuasiveness or magnificent declamation; where elaborate thinkers searched the obscurest enigmas of theology and science, the audience groping to follow,—you who were there remember that one evening, at a sort of missionary meeting, there came forward a young man, slender and tall, and as lank as Abraham Lin-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

coln. His straight hair ran down behind his ears to the collar of his coat. He rambled in his speech, as if he were timid before that cultivated assembly, and stumbled over the minutes which at first he held in his hands. But his voice somehow was of that sympathetic, human sort that you couldn't help listening to; his eyes were so honest and soulful and saintly that you couldn't look away from them; and as he narrated in a homely way his labors among obscure men in obscure places, his preaching in barns and taverns and court-houses and school-houses and school-rooms, in that Egypt which is the Nazareth of his state, going about doing good, literally following in the steps of the Saviour, with scarce other compensation than his own sense of doing the Master's work,—so worn with his labors that he was almost too ill to be at Saratoga,—the heart of every man and woman in that audience went out to him and loved him; and more than one cheek was wet with tears. Human nature, which loves warm existences and generous deeds, and wearies of philosophy and talk, seemed to assert itself with a glad sense of relief; and this genuine Christian warrior and holy pilgrim was from that hour the very hero of that great Conference, though himself all the time utterly simple, unaffected and unconscious; and as I looked at his pale face and listened to the sweet Methodistical appeal of his voice, which rose in the eloquence of truth, when he threw his notes aside and uttered his soul in the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

freedom of his own quaint, natural exhortatory style, like a bird singing in its native forest; and as I thought of the Jim Bludsos, the rough natures, the hungry souls, whom no white choker or clerical pendant could have touched, but to whom he had brought a gleam of the higher life, and in whom he had implanted the springing seeds of Christian charity and culture; of the homes he had blessed and the hearts he had lightened,—then and there it was that, walking on the plains of Judea, healing the sick, blessing little children, feeding the poor, and comforting the sinning and the sorrowing, I saw, with my own eyes, once more upon the earth, a living disciple of the blessed Jesus of Nazareth. Such a spirit and such a life, adapting themselves, of course, to every variety of circumstances and society, are what, if there is any worth in Christianity, the Christian Unitarian body wants today; for such were the life and spirit of Jesus Christ, its founder.”

Thus I was introduced only too kindly to our Unitarian body. I feel unworthy and rebuked every time I read such kind words as I have quoted about myself in these pages; but I have been persuaded that it is due the cause to which I have devoted my life, and to the distinguished friends who have thus kindly testified and co-operated with me in the mission. In the words of him who gave me the “charge” at my

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ordination, Rev. Charles G. Ames: "I have learned from the Swedish sage that he who takes to himself the credit of good works which the Lord enables him to perform, is at heart a thief — he takes what does not belong to him."

I never again received such enthusiastic applause as that at Saratoga. I never was invited but once afterwards to address so large an audience. That was a year or two after the meeting at Saratoga and it was in Music Hall, Boston. I was in no condition to speak. I had been dissipating, that is, I had accepted invitations to too many banquets. In company with Doctors Hale, Bellows, Brooke Herford, Rush R. Shippen and others, I had lunched at Harvard College with President Eliot; and on the evening of the meeting at Music Hall I had been with Doctor Hale to a club banquet in Boston, where by request I had given some report of my acquaintance with Ralph Waldo Emerson on his lecture tour in the West. My address at Music Hall seemed to fall flat, though there were some expressions of approval from Doctors Bellows and Hale and a few others on the platform. I hope never to forget how, at the close of the meeting, Doctor Hale kindly

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

took me to his home, put me to bed, passed his hand softly over my face and said soothingly: "Good night! Good night! You have done what you could. Now don't worry, but sleep sweetly." I had tried very hard to keep from making known my distress; but somehow the dear man knew it all.

That meeting at Saratoga made me quite reconciled to my task. Mrs. Douthit and I then consecrated ourselves anew to this mission. It is not too much to say that mostly in the strength of the inspiration and assurance received at that Conference, I have kept courage and pegged away here "in His name" thirty-eight years longer than I had expected. I have held on, hoping against hope deferred, because I believed that whatever else might be said of the faults of Unitarians, they were noted for being as good as their word, and so long as I gave myself and my all to the faith that makes faithful and also tried my best to practise the faithfulness that makes faith in the service of man, I might trust the good Providence for the result. And through all the years since, from time to time, I have had cause to thank God and take courage from the men and women who were at that Saratoga Conference, though most of

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

their faces I have not seen since, nor can I hope to see them again on earth.

After so many years in the rural districts I felt I ought to make a determined effort in Shelbyville. On Sunday, February 15, 1874, I began regular preaching in the old court-house. Several discouraging attempts had been made to secure a hearing at this place. In my diary for Monday, February 22, 1869, occurs the following:

“A muddy, disagreeable ride to the court-house and back last night. About a dozen were present. They listened suspiciously rather than kindly. Some acted as if they had gone into the wrong pew and were ashamed of it. Next Sunday I shall try again in the day time.”

Accordingly I walked five miles on the next Sunday morning to the court-house. The appointment had been thoroughly advertised. A short time before the hour for services one man looked in at the door, and on being told there would be preaching if anyone came to hear, said perhaps he'd come around again after awhile, and he went away. That fellow lived in the district where I had been holding meetings, and had come to Shelbyville on Saturday, and had got so drunk he couldn't get home that

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

night, and so was on hand, to a small extent, that Sunday morning. I waited until nearly twelve o'clock, but the man not returning and no one else coming, I turned my steps homeward somewhat cast down, but determined to try it again.

Occasional efforts were made during the next five years, but were not very successful. But now, in 1874, I determined that if the audience averaged no more than one dozen, and though the minister had to be his own janitor, and pay all incidental expenses, he would nevertheless stick to it for one year. At the first meeting there were about two dozen persons present, and the audiences gradually increased. A number of the members of my congregations in the country came in and helped. Unexpected friends arose. A small Sunday-school was organized in the spring of 1874, and rapidly increased in number and interest. The Church of the Disciples, Boston, Dr. James Freeman Clarke, pastor, sent us a donation of books for the Sunday-school library. Then our old singing teacher, Mr. Jacob C. Smith, the same who had got acquainted with me in the country work, came over from Marshall, Illinois, and taught one of his popular singing-schools in the court-house during May, 1874, closing with

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

a jubilee concert, and giving part of the proceeds for purchase of an organ for the society.

On Thursday evening, May 13, 1875, at a meeting held in the court-house, thirteen persons united in a church organization. November 1, 1875, the members had increased to twenty-one persons. During the month of February, 1876, real revival meetings were commenced at the court-house, continuing with unabated interest every night for eight weeks. Elder John Ellis, of whom I have spoken on another page, assisted in this memorable revival.

I believe that protracted effort was what Theodore Parker would call "A True Revival of Religion." The result was certainly ethical. I think I may say the key-note of the meetings was struck by Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who preached in the old court-house a while before the meetings began. His sermon was very practical and enthusiastic. It caused the dry bones to shake.

The final result was a church of seventy-five members of the unchurched and mostly poor people of Shelbyville, with several of the county officers. Many had been hard drinkers. One had been a saloon keeper for forty years.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

A few years before, in his saloon, when I called to notify him that I would prosecute him for letting my father have whiskey contrary to law, in order to intimidate me he made a pass to break my head with a whiskey glass. But he was "cooled off" instantly by a "few pointed words" and a movement to "make good" from my now sainted brother George, who was with me and who was of size, nerve and force enough to command respect, though he was still a mere boy. It was the only time I ever saw my brother thoroughly angry. Now this man consulted with me as to the disposition to make of his stock of liquors, and was my faithful friend and helper until his death. He was punctual at church and took a great pride in being the first one at the annual day-dawn Easter services, of which I believe he attended every one until he was called to the everlasting Easter morn.

One of the prime movers in building the Unitarian Church in Shelbyville, and a most generous supporter of the mission in his last years, was one of the most beloved and trusted of public officials. His grandfather won honor as a soldier of the Revolution and lived to be over eighty years old. This man might have been Governor of Illinois or held some other

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

high position if he had not fallen a victim in the prime of life to the social glass. This man came among the first to hear the preaching at the old court-house in Shelbyville, and welcomed with joy as a new found treasure the Unitarian gospel. He exclaimed: "That is what I have always thought, but never heard preached before! I want to join that church." And he did so, in good earnest, though he had been during the Civil War strongly opposed to my politics. Then he told me privately of his weakness. He did not tell everybody, but he told me more than I felt at liberty to relate until his warfare on earth was over.

I remember well on the same night after he signed the church covenant, at the old court-house, he asked me to walk alone with him, and said: "Douthit, I am in a worse way than most people think; you don't know it all. You don't know how hard it is for me to resist when old friends ask me to drink. I'm going to have a desperate struggle, and I will need all the help I can get. But I have enlisted for the war and am determined to stick if you'll stick by me." I replied: "Yes, my dear fellow, I will stick by you so long as you will let me; I will stick by you in this world and the next, if God will

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

let me, and I believe He will." "Douthit," he said, "I would give all I am worth in this world, if I might have heard forty years ago, the words of warning and the gospel which I have heard within the last few years."

I think it is not too much to say that the first Congregational (Unitarian) Church of Shelbyville would never have been built if it had not been for that man, William A. Cochran. He was a most loyal member to the last. In the line of church charities and expenses, he always led the subscription. By his personal influence, he brought many of his friends to church with him, and the people elected him and re-elected him clerk of the Circuit Court until his death.

This man was a good listener, and he never got offended at the preacher who was sometimes, perhaps, too personal and practical. He often expressed to me the joy it was to him to be able to give to the church, and when he lost large sums of money, he would say to me, "I wish I had given that to the church, for then I would have had no regrets."

I have said in the pulpit, and will repeat here, that if the little church in Shelbyville has been the means of saving even one man like William

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

A. Cochran, to such heroic effort for reform, and thus redeemed his life, then the church is worth all it has cost of toil and money. The great question of the Master should ever be in mind: "What doth it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The Shelbyville church, costing six thousand dollars, was built two blocks from the old courthouse, and was paid for and dedicated within the year. The corner-stone was laid on Monday, November 2, 1875. Rev. Benjamin Mills, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Rev. Theodore Brooks, pastor of the Christian Church, and Elder John Ellis assisted in the ceremonies. On May 8, 1876, the dedication exercises were held, Rev. James Freeman Clarke, D.D., preaching the sermon of the morning; and in the evening of the same day I was installed as pastor of the congregation, Rev. W. G. Eliot preaching the sermon. Dr. John H. Heywood, Rev. F. L. Hosmer, Elder John Ellis and the Rabbi Sonnenschein of St. Louis, assisted in the ceremonies of installation and dedication.

In the spring of 1875 we left the little home and farm in the country and moved to Shelbyville, and two years later to the substantial brick dwelling next door to the church, since known as

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the Unitarian parsonage. Here has been my home for over thirty years. While I felt that for the good of the mission the change must be made, I foresaw that it would make the ever present financial problem more difficult for us. In my humble cottage in the country, near my brothers and other relatives, with my little farm and garden, expenses were small and the problem of how to live could be more easily met in case of insufficient salary or failing strength which might render me unable to work. But the resolution of the Saratoga Conference of 1874 and the surprising success of the effort in Shelbyville later, encouraged me to risk all. I knew it would be a hard tug, for I could not but be mindful of the inherent weakness of the organization in a financial way. The members were mostly poor people on the move, and Shelbyville is an old town of only three thousand population and ten churches. But I put all the energy and life I could into the work and refused to be discouraged by obstacles.

There is one experience of my ministry in those years that lingers in memory, as about my only real vacation. It was the summer of the Philadelphia Centennial year. I had become so worn by the continuous strain incident to the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

pioneer church work that I could hardly walk a hundred yards without stopping to rest. After the church dedication, it was somehow made possible for me to take my wife and four children to visit with her people near Boston and not worry about the expense. While there we spent some weeks in a cottage on the sea shore, but I did not gain as fast as it seemed I ought. I had read Starr King's charming book about the White Mountains and longed to be there. Born and reared on the prairie, I had had no experience of mountains. I was persuaded to go there alone for a week in August, 1876. The train arrived at Bethlehem, N. H., near Mt. Agassiz, late in the evening. The altitude had changed the temperature for me from August to a cool October. There was a blazing fire in the fireplace at the hotel, and a cheerful company of strangers chatting pleasantly around the fire. I slept sweetly and next morning after breakfast thought to take a stroll a short way up Mt. Agassiz; but I kept on and on until I had climbed to the top, and when I came down was astonished not to feel weary.

Learning that Henry Ward Beecher was at the Twin Mountain House, near the foot of Mt.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Washington, I resolved to go there and stay a few days. I engaged lodging at a farm house near by. While at the railroad station one day, as a passing train stopped, I heard a cheery voice from the cars call my name and say, "Am glad to see you here." It was the voice of William H. Baldwin, President of the Young Men's Christian Union, of Boston. He was not to stop there but he jumped off the train hurriedly and said: "I want you to meet my friend Beecher. Let me write you an introduction," and he hastily wrote in pencil on a card kindly commending me to the famous preacher. That was just like President Baldwin, as every one will say who knows him. I had been a subscriber to Mr. Beecher's paper, the *Christian Union*, from the first number, and had read his sermons for many years.

I found Mr. Beecher at the hotel engaged in a game of croquet with Mrs. Mary A. Livermore and her husband, Rev. Daniel P. Livermore, the Universalist minister. I presented my card of introduction when Mr. Beecher was through playing. He greeted me cordially, and among other things remarked that Mr. Baldwin was a grand, good man doing a noble work in Boston. He said the bigotry of the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Young Men's Christian Association in excluding Unitarians and Universalists caused the Young Men's Christian Union to be organized with Mr. Baldwin as president. "I am glad to know," continued Mr. Beecher, "the movement is growing rapidly in public favor as it well deserves." When I told Mr. Beecher that I had read him for years and admired and loved him because he had done so much to save me from religious unbelief, he dropped his head and said in a serious tone: "Well, such testimony helps me to better bear the unjust criticism of which I have had to suffer a good deal lately."

He invited me to see him any time at his room and I had pleasant and profitable interviews with him during the week. He expressed kindly interest in my work and said, "If you need any books or any help anyway let me know." I thanked him, but felt that his sympathy and friendship were all I deserved, and never asked for anything more. I heard him preach on Sunday a memorable sermon on the "Joys of the Christian Life." It became known, I suspect through Mr. Beecher, that I was a minister and interested in temperance reform. I was invited to speak on temperance

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

one Saturday evening at the Town House and then accepted an invitation to preach the next day, Sunday, evening. I was greatly surprised to have my message received with such favor, but still more surprised, and also amused, to find that some of the farmers mistook me for Mr. Beecher. It had been rumored that he was to preach there at that time and people had come from miles around to hear him. I certainly did not in the least resemble the great preacher.

But the most remarkable experience of all to me was the marvelous uplift in physical vigor. I had been there but a few days before I climbed on foot five miles or more over rugged steeps to the summit of Mt. Washington and returned the same day. This sudden recovery of strength was the most remarkable experience of the kind in my life. On reaching the summit I was overcome with awe and felt that I must fall down and worship. The summit was covered with snow. For scores of miles around I beheld mountains and valleys and rivers and villages that seemed as clusters of toy houses. The Atlantic Ocean glimmered in the sunlight nearly one hundred miles in the distance. I read in silence some passages of scripture with new meaning: "Great and marvelous are thy

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

works, Lord God Almighty." "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou had'st formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." "Lead me unto the Rock that is higher than I." "Thou art my Rock and my Salvation."

While I was thus reading, a stranger perched on a great rock above me suddenly broke out in a loud voice with scripture quotations followed with a hymn like "Rock of Ages," and all the people round about stood still and silent as if enchanted. That scene and day, August 23, 1876, linger bright in memory as the close of the last real vacation and the most inspiring experience in my life. Fresh power came to me to will to be, and to do more and better than ever. I resolved then that for the sake of preparation for more and better work I would make a pilgrimage to that altar of the Most High every few years, the rest of my life. The resolution has never been kept. Meager means and fidelity to nearer duty have prevented.

XI

A temperance crusade had been started by our meetings at the court-house, and kept up when we moved to the church, so that when the so-called Blue Ribbon Crusade swept over the country the meetings in Shelbyville naturally started in our church, and then moved to the largest audience room in town. For forty-two nights in succession we held crowded houses, until it seemed that nearly every man and woman in Shelbyville and vicinity was wearing a blue ribbon as a token of having signed the pledge of total abstinence. I plunged into this work with all my might, regardless of my limitations of strength and heedless of consequences. I was borne on by the wave of enthusiasm that everywhere prevailed. At the close of those meetings early in the year of 1878, I was prostrate for six weeks.

A woman physician, Dr. Petrie, from New York state, happened in town, and learning of my case, kindly came to see me as

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I lay helpless. She looked at me and said: "I have a message from heaven for you. You think you will die, but you will not. But if you don't stop so much speaking night after night you will become a miserable, chronic wreck and useless the rest of your life." The message deeply impressed me. I took the advice. I wish I knew the address to-day of the good messenger so that I might express to her my gratitude for the timely, wise warning that has helped me to keep a frail body in fair working condition for thirty years longer than I expected. I was compelled, however, to give up the work of a circuit preacher and confine my labor to places near home. Thenceforward I gave myself more to local preaching and Post-office Misson work, the latter finally, for the most part through *Our Best Words*. I edited and printed this paper first as a parish paper, in 1880, and then for a year more as a missionary monthly, jointly with Dr. Charles G. Ames, then minister in Philadelphia.

I have always believed in proclaiming my message from the house-tops — that is, in advertising and in spreading the principles which I have felt most called upon to preach. I early recognized the power of the press

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

as an ally in this regard, and have improved every opportunity to enlist the services of the printed word in my work. I have been a contributor to the local press most of the time for fifty years, beginning as associate editor of the short-lived *Shelby County Freeman*, the first Free Soil or Republican paper started in this region of Illinois. The *Union* was established in 1863 by John W. Johnson. He was a sort of Parson Brownlow editor, and a terror to "Copperheads," and his columns were always open for anything I wished to say. Several of my sermons on the war were published in the *Union*. In 1868 the late Capt. Park T. Martin, of Danville, Illinois, became editor and, in part, proprietor of the *Union*, and invited me to edit "The Preaching Corner," of three columns, more or less. This I did for the year 1870; and I continued to contribute often to the local press thereafter. With a few rare and conspicuous exceptions during the Civil War and in my early anti-saloon crusade, I have been treated with marked courtesy and even generosity by the editorial fraternity. Many local newspapers exchange with *Our Best Words*, and the local press in this and adjoining counties and the reform press

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

over the state and nation have been especially kind and generous in their notices of my work at Lithia Springs.

In the several local histories of Shelby County, large, costly volumes, I have been solicited to write accounts of the Unitarian Mission and have been given ample space in these substantial records of local history to tell of our gospel and the effort to spread its principles here. These volumes are in the homes of the prominent families in every township in the county, and will be conned over again and again by coming generations.

From the time it was established in 1880, twenty-eight years ago, *Our Best Words* has had a circulation varying from five hundred to ten thousand copies. The paper has been read by hundreds of ministers and editors of all sects and parties. These have learned through its pages truths and facts, especially about Unitarians, that they probably would never have otherwise known. I think it is not too much to say that without some such printed messenger this mission could not have had half the influence in making known our principles of freedom, fellowship and character in religion; and I am quite sure Lithia Springs Chautauqua

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

could not have been possible. Through the reading of this little paper, several persons at a distance have expressed the desire to become identified with the Unitarian church, — persons who have not before learned of any church they could honestly join. The editing and publishing of the paper has been a labor of love with me, and despite the defects and drawbacks, the work upon it has been a pleasant diversion and has often proved a rest from greater cares; so that, on the whole, it has been to me about the most satisfactory feature of my missionary service. Without such winged words, I should feel like a disarmed soldier in battle.

In connection with editorial work on *Our Best Words* for twenty years past, my son, George L. Douthit, and I have published, besides various tracts and pamphlets, the following books, most of which I have edited: "Shelby Seminary Memorial," Illustrated, cloth, 116 pages; "Out of Darkness Into Light;" "The Journal of a Bereaved Mother," by Mrs. M. A. Deane, cloth, 400 pages; and "The Life Story and Personal Reminiscences of Col. John Sobieski," Illustrated, cloth, 400 pages.

When partly recovered from that long pros-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

tration, occasioned by overwork during the Blue Ribbon Crusade meetings, I began war against the snares and stumbling-blocks in the way of those who had taken the pledge and joined the church in an effort to reform. These were the open door of the licensed dram-shop, the corrupt politics, and the treating customs of the partisan bosses and the candidates for office. This custom was so deeply rooted and of such long standing that the majority of voters in both parties regarded it as necessary for success. "Of course no man can be elected to office in this county unless he sets up the drinks freely. You have got to do it or be beaten." That was the stereotyped reply of political candidates when I began to plead with them. Even some members of my congregation would insist that they had to do it, and persisted in the face of my solemn protest. I saw no more effective method of working than to publicly expose through *Our Best Words* every clearly known case of a candidate setting up drinks while electioneering for office. I gave warning publicly that I would publish the names of any and all candidates who treated voters to liquor. It was done, but it was a most painful experience. The saloon was in politics, and I

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

enlisted for the war to drive it out. Neither of the political parties would tackle the giant, nor whisper a word against it in their platforms or party organs. By the help of Mrs. Ada H. Kepley, of Effingham County, a member of my Shelbyville congregation, and about a dozen Free Methodists, at the court-house, May 29, 1886, the Prohibition party had been organized, and I warmly espoused the cause. But this political activity was a most troublous and costly business to me. My salary was cut down and some friends at home and abroad turned away. My printing press would probably have been burned but for the fact that it was in a third story where fire could not consume it without putting a whole block in ashes.

Thanks to the efforts of Rev. J. T. Sunderland, Rev. John H. Heywood, Dr. James De Normandie and other friends, I was enabled to live and continue the battle, which went on till the snake was scotched if not killed. At least it has since been possible for men to be elected to office in Shelby County who do not bribe voters with liquor. The saloons were driven out of Shelbyville, and my printing office was moved into the room on the corner of the public square where one of the largest and most pop-

CHAUTAUQUA GROUNDS, LITHIA SPRINGS

With the Tabernacle in the distance and the "Springs" under the roof just to the left of the centre of the picture





JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ular saloons had been kept. *Our Best Words* had become a weekly, with the largest circulation of any paper in the county, and by a combination with the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association and similar movements, we came very near electing at one time, 1890, an anti-saloon ticket in the county. And yet, notwithstanding my outspokenness for over fifty-six years against their business, I am often called upon to officiate at the funerals of saloon keepers or members of their families. My friend, Senator Chafee, once made the public statement that no other preacher in town is called on oftener to serve at the funerals of dead drunkards. Saloon keepers have of late years treated me with courtesy. The only instance I recall to the contrary, besides the one already given in this story, is of a saloon keeper who took occasion, on meeting me in a friend's office, to speak insultingly to me, and abuse me because of my criticism of saloons. I expostulated with him and told him that his father and mother in heaven, who were my old friends, would be grieved to have him treat me so, and that he ought to quit his bad business and become a better man; that I meant only kindness to him. Imagine my surprise when, in less than two

weeks afterward, that man was converted, joined the church of his choice, and sent me a special invitation to be present at his baptism. He quit the saloon business and remained a consistent church member the rest of his life. It is one of the strangest, most astonishing experiences of my life, that so very many who have been most bitter in their abuse of me have come to be among the most faithful friends.

But I was in a cross-fire on the one hand because of my aggressive temperance work, and on the other because of my Unitarianism. Several of the ablest friends of the mission at home and abroad had died. Many of our church members had gone away. My salary grew smaller, so that I felt for the time I must either give up the paper or give up my home and the mission. At that time a stranger came to me with a tempting price to buy my paper, and in February, 1892, I sold out, but with the distinct understanding that *Our Best Words* would be continued in the same line of battle. I was deceived. It soon became an organ of the Populists. I was worn down again, and a season of sad reverses followed. Then, after a year or so, in which saloons again came into Shelbyville, a few friends rallied to my aid; and I

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

began to publish in April, 1893, a small monthly paper, *Simple Truth*, and finally repurchased *Our Best Words*, in October, 1894. Then the Unitarians near Lithia Springs, some of whom had worshiped at Oak Grove Chapel, went to work and built another church near where the Log Church stood, and right by the graves of my father and mother. This was called Jordan Unitarian Church. The church was dedicated July 24, 1892, free from debt. I never consented to have a church dedicated otherwise. My dear friend, Rev. John H. Heywood of Louisville, and Rev. T. B. Forbush, then the zealous western superintendent of the American Unitarian Association, and others assisted.

My wife and I felt greatly honored and blessed to have, during years before their translation, the hearty sympathy and kind co-operation of such saintly women as Miss Elizabeth G. Huidekoper, mentioned elsewhere in this story; Miss Dorothea Dix, the famous American philanthropist; Mrs. Martha P. Lowe, wife of Charles Lowe, the much loved Secretary over thirty years ago, of the American Unitarian Association, and Miss Elizabeth P. Channing, niece of the immortal Doctor Channing. The

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

cheerful letters which these women frequently wrote us through twenty-five years or more, bring to mind, as I write, some of the happiest recollections of my life, — but the happiness is lessened by the thought that I ought to have been a better man and accomplished more good when favored with the friendships of such noble women. Miss Channing gave me, a few years before her death, what I prize as one of the most precious treasures, — an autograph letter of her distinguished uncle. The letter is most tenderly consoling for the bereaved, especially for all who have lost good mothers.

Here is a copy of Dr. Channing's letter:

“NEWPORT, Sept. 25th, 1837.

“*My Dear Elizabeth,*—

“I sympathize with you in your great loss, for great it is to you, though I trust it is unspeakable gain to your departed friend. I was not at all surprised to hear of your mother's death; grief and increasing infirmity had long been leading her toward the grave, and now we trust her wounded spirit is at rest. I never knew a more tender heart. She not only felt her bereavements most keenly, but was exquisitely alive to the sufferings of her fellow creatures. Few fulfilled as she did the law of ‘bearing others’ burdens.’ What deep sympathy, what deepest solicitude, what never wearied

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

kindness have you experienced from her from the first hour of life. What can equal in constancy and disinterestedness a mother's love! In losing such a friend we lose one whose place cannot be supplied. You must be grateful that you were so long allowed to commune with the affectionate spirit; that you had so many opportunities of testifying your gratitude; that you witnessed so much desire, amidst her trouble and peculiar sensibilities, to resign herself to the Divine Will. You must feel that she died, as she had lived, to minister to you,—to minister to the spirit by carrying your thoughts upward and into eternity. Though the outward ear cannot hear her voice, yet 'she speaketh.' Our friends whilst they lived bound us to earth. By death they perform a more blessed office, they may lift us above it. I hope it will be the effect of your suffering,—to tranquilize your mind, to diminish the power of shortlived evil over you, to give you fortitude and energy. I beg you to present my affectionate remembrance to your sister. My love to George and the children. Ruth and my children are well and hold yours in affectionate remembrance.

“Very truly and affectionately,

“Yours,

“WM. E. CHANNING.”

In the beautiful “Autobiography and Diary” of the late Miss E. P. Channing, is the following record:

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

“Sept. 14th, 1906 (?) :— Gave my mite to help on Mr. Douthit's mission, I think the needed five thousand will be raised, and the apostle of temperance, who has disarmed sectarian prejudice, will at last be comforted with the thought that he is understood.”

XII

My first printed sermon was on "Unity in Division." It appeared in the *Phrenological Journal*, about forty years ago. I have always been more eager to imbibe the spirit of Jesus and impart something of that spirit to others than to make people take my denominational badge. It has been my hobby, so to speak, to insist upon loyalty to conviction, to respect the honest convictions of others and rejoice in the good they may do that I cannot do. I am glad to consider myself a member of the church universal with a door wide open as the Kingdom of Heaven, from which nothing but an unchristian spirit can exclude me. In the beginning of my mission, I had preached regularly at the old Salem school-house for a long time when one of my auditors, the late Curtis Hornbeck, Esq., father of Rev. Marcus D. Hornbeck, now a prominent Methodist minister of Denver, Colorado, said to me one day: "Brother Douthit, you are the queerest

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

preacher I ever knew. Here you have been preaching for two years and have never once given any of us a chance to join the church. If you had, myself and wife and all my family would have joined, but now we have joined another church."

I am convinced that as a rule it is better for people to become members of some church than to be habitual non-church goers, or religious tramps. I have observed that children of Protestant families who have united with the Catholic church have been better, other things being equal, than the children of Protestants that grow up without any church association. Oft-times when I have been going many miles over bad roads to meet my appointments, I have met, going or coming, Catholic friends who must travel long distances to attend their morning services at church, while at the same time, some persons calling themselves Unitarians, who lived near church and who would go twice as far over bad roads on week days to serve themselves and for pleasure, were absent from their church service because of the bad roads, the inclement weather, a Sunday headache, or a social visit.

For the fifty years I have been preaching, I never knew a family, to the best of my knowl-

edge and belief, that habitually neglected church duties which did not degenerate in morals and manners, and become worse than their fathers and mothers, — worse even though “smart” and educated, in a sense. The more respectable such persons, the more mischievous their examples and influence on society.

“There are two freedoms,” says Charles Kingsley, “the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the true, where a man is free to do what he ought.”

Non-observance of Sunday and the non-church going habit have been among my greatest causes of discouragement. Out-spoken opposition and bitter persecution are not so hurtful as the selfish indifference of professed friends of a good cause.

We read that Jesus “went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, *as his custom was.*” But I have found many people who profess to be sincere followers of Christ who when in distress will send for a minister, and yet who will on the Sabbath day follow a custom directly contrary to the example of Jesus. They will substitute visits and feasts for church-going. Sometimes people use Sunday for labor that could better be done on week days, and they

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

cannot go to church because they must take an ox out of the pit which they put in on Saturday, or had neglected all the week to take out. I think of communities destitute of church services where there might now be flourishing congregations if the people had formed the habit of attending public worship on the Sabbath. I write with deep feeling on this subject. My mother in heaven was during much of her life, a slave to the kitchen on Sunday, cooking over a hot, open fireplace, and often having no chance for church or rest. Therefore, for many years, I have made it a rule not to accept invitations to dinner on Sunday where I knew some of the family were kept from church to prepare it. Not that I object to dinners or social visits, but I do earnestly protest against the discouraging, soul-starving and church-killing habit of staying away from church for a Sunday pleasure excursion, or to cook and eat; or to trade or do any work that could as well be done some other day. In fact I have known the morals of more than one community blighted by the habit of manual labor or horse-racing and ball games on Sunday. The following is a record of the diary of my brother George. I give

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

it as illustrating a not unusual scene in the early years of my work:

“Sunday, June 16th, 1867:—I went with Jasper to Salem. He preached about a man’s social nature,—his duty of cultivating and exercising it by worshiping God together on Sundays. The folks around here have become so industrious, it would seem, that they have no time to cultivate anything, unless it would be a patch of corn, or to plant any kind of seed on the Sabbath, except corn. There are eight teams within a mile of here at work today. There would appear to be some plausible excuse for working to-day, it being so late in the season. But I think they will lose more than they will gain. They will lower their moral nature; and in the very act of doing so they will plant seeds of thorns that will ultimately grow and prick them sore. They may raise better corn; but if they do, it will be so much the worse, it will be increasing an already too large acquisitiveness at the expense of their higher nature.”

In every case I now remember, that prophecy of my brother, made over forty years ago when he was nineteen years old, has proved true. Yes, “God made the Sabbath for man.” That is, he has made one day in seven for man to use mostly for rest and public worship, — made this

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

a law of necessity in human nature, and if this law is violated a bitter harvest must be reaped sooner or later. No man can habitually defy that custom of Jesus without being worse for it.

While most of my labors have been in this county of Shelby, yet in the early years I preached in the towns along the line of the Illinois Central Railroad, main trunk and branch, from Decatur and Champaign southward to Centralia, and also on the Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Alton and St. Louis line, from Charleston in eastern Illinois to Litchfield in the west. The managers of the above roads kindly gave me free passage.

During the first few years of my charge in Shelbyville, at the urgent request of Dr. E. E. Hale and others, I tried to act as a state missionary for Illinois. I kept up the services in Shelby County, and preached also in Jacksonville, Alton, Hillsboro, Pana, Decatur, Farina, Centralia, Effingham, Charleston, Urbana and Champaign, the seat of the state University. At the two last named cities I had the hearty co-operation of the then president of the University, Dr. Peabody, and others of the Board of Instruction. But I broke down at such

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

work. There was not enough of me to go around. Finally I concentrated my effort in Shelbyville and the vicinity, using *Our Best Words* as an arm to reach out to the acquaintances made over the state. I felt a stronger call to preach to the people that would gather to hear me in the school-houses and out-door meetings in the vicinity of my birthplace, though certainly money was never an element of strength to this call.

This home mission has been to me a high calling of God. I have by invitation preached in churches in the larger cities of the nation, such as Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Toledo, Columbus, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Louisville, New Orleans, and other cities. I can truthfully say, I have never anywhere nor at any time felt more honored before God than in preaching to Irish-Catholics and other neighbors at Log Church; and never have felt so loud a call anywhere as at places like the old whiskey-haunted courthouse in Shelbyville.

There are a few things which may seem trifling in themselves which I will mention as showing the progress of ideas here since the mission began and in which it has led.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

The first time I ever saw flowers in a church in Illinois was in the little school-house where we first held Unitarian services before we had any house of worship. The school-teacher, who was an eastern woman, had gathered some crab-apple, red-bud, plum-tree and other blossoms, and put them in an old tin can on the desk in front of me. When I went to the desk to begin services, a good old brother from the rear of the house came up, and said, "I'll put *these things* out of your way." Suiting the action to the words, he threw the buds and blossoms out of the window, and put the can under the desk. It was taken as a matter of course by the assembly. I was somewhat embarrassed, but proceeded with the service as well as I could. This incident fitly illustrates the only kind of theology I heard until I was seventeen years old, — a theology that hid the bright things of earth and made it as bare and forbidding and as much a vale of tears as possible.

The first Easter service I ever knew observed by any other church than Catholics was by our little assembly of Unitarians. In commemoration of the first Easter morning at the sepulchre, a meeting conducted by the pastor has been held

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in the Unitarian Church in Shelbyville, every year since the church was built in 1876. The first Christmas tree that I ever saw in Illinois was in the Unitarian Sunday-school. The first Thanksgiving service held in response to the President's proclamation in Shelby County, outside of Shelbyville, was held in our Oak Grove Chapel. We held services of mercy and distributed *Our Dumb Animals* for years before others recognized that religion had enough bearing on kindness to animals to call for a special service. The first time I ever knew of "Nearer my God to Thee" being sung in this vicinity, was in the old Log Church by my brother George, who had been at Antioch College and had brought it home with him. The first memorial service held in the county for a Union soldier was held by the Unitarian missionary.

I remember when funeral sermons were preached some time after the burial it was customary to sing, "Hark! from the Tombs a Doleful Sound," but I have not heard that hymn for forty years. Instead they sing the hymns and songs of brighter hope, such as "One Sweetly Solemn Thought," and "Lead Kindly Light." Now flowers provoke sweet thoughts

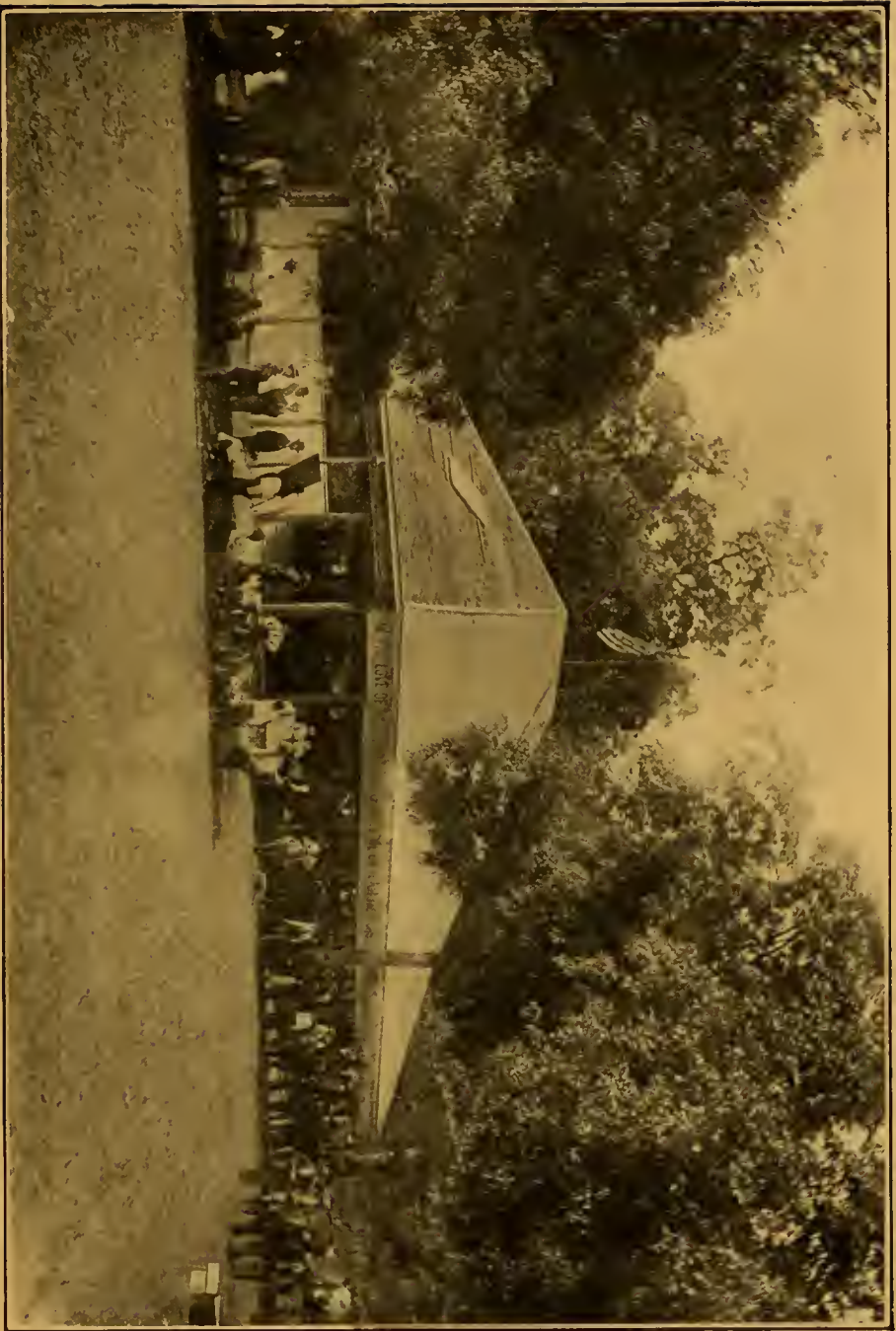
JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in all the churches; and many of them have a special "Flower Service," and vie with each other in celebrating Easter and Christmas; and we have had union Thanksgiving services, where Catholics, Unitarians and orthodox joined.

I have tried to circulate only such literature as would have a tendency to liberate Christians and Christianize "liberals." The result has been a wonderful change in the attitude of the churches of all denominations in the vicinity, including the Catholic. Some of my best friends have been the orthodox pastors and the Catholic priests.

We have built in this mission four church edifices in Shelby County, the largest being a substantial brick structure costing six thousand dollars, and three of wood, costing eight hundred dollars, fifteen hundred dollars and twelve hundred dollars each, besides one in Mattoon costing ten thousand dollars, and a tabernacle at Lithia Springs for our summer meetings, seating fifteen hundred. This auditorium has recently been greatly improved at a cost of sixteen hundred dollars, or more. In addition to the above, the Library Chapel at Lithia was dedicated in August, 1904.

The American Unitarian Association now



THE TABERNACLE AT LITHIA SPRINGS

holds in trust for missionary purposes the two hundred acres of Lithia Springs land and the improvements thereon, worth twenty thousand dollars at a low estimate, the church edifice and lot within a square of the court-house in Shelbyville, valued at five thousand dollars, the Jordan Chapel and lot within two miles of Lithia Springs, valued at fifteen hundred dollars, and the Library Chapel, at Lithia, valued at twelve hundred dollars.

I have always insisted that the people of the community should build their house of worship themselves. I never solicited outside aid for a church edifice except in one instance, and I have that to regret. This was the case of Unity church at Mattoon. It was built at the close of the Civil War, when material was very high, so that it was said to have cost nearly ten thousand dollars. It was then and thus built against my advice. However, a pathetic appeal from the late Thomas P. C. Lane, the prime mover for the building, prompted me to help free it of debt. Mr. Lane was plunged suddenly into deep sorrow by the death of his little daughter, Nina. He wished the church to be a memorial of her. Therefore, to help lift the debt on the church, I received fifteen hundred

dollars from Mrs. Anna Richmond, of Providence, R. I., Miss Dorothea Dix, members of Robert Collyer's Church of the Messiah, N. Y., and others; and by the advice of Dr. Wm. G. Eliot I paid this money to the trustees of the Mattoon church with the stipulation that in case the building ever ceased for the term of two years to be used for Unitarian services, and the property should revert and be sold, the fifteen hundred dollars should be applied to general missionary work in the state of Illinois. The building did cease to be thus used and the property was sold in 1906; but I am informed that the trustees think best to put on interest the fifteen hundred dollars for a time, with the rest of the funds from the sale, in the hope that opportunity may yet offer for building another Unitarian edifice in that enterprising city. I must think there would be more practical religion in at once applying the money according to the above stipulation to the support of some good, live Christian missionary in this state. If the people are filled with the spirit of Christ, the necessary churches will be built as naturally as the bark grows on living trees. Spirit controls matter,—not matter spirit. A costly church building, with few or

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

no worshipers, is like a mighty ship of war with few or none to man it.

As nearly as I can estimate, over one thousand persons have been received into church membership under my ministry in this vicinity, two hundred children christened, nearly one thousand funerals attended, and about four hundred marriage ceremonies performed. Many of those to whom I have ministered have passed from earth. And a great number of those who have united in church covenant are scattered abroad in the different states from Massachusetts Bay to "where rolls the Oregon," and from the Dakotas on the north to Texas in the south.

One object which at the beginning I confidently hoped to achieve in this mission was to establish at least one self-supporting congregation. I confess that the failure to do this has been the saddest, sorest disappointment of my forty-five years' missionary effort. However, with a consciousness of having done what I could for the right as God gave me to see the right, I am content to leave results with Him.

My work has been largely of a social settlement character, with a religious emphasis, and mostly in rural districts. I have preached to

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

tenants, wage-workers, and people on the wing; so that, from year to year, my congregations have come and gone. Young people, ambitious to rise in the world, have passed on to where they hoped for more advantages. But alas! some have overlooked the fact that the only way to really rise in this world or the next, is to *live a good life*. I am thinking of some who have gone to large cities who would better be cultivating the fertile land and raising fruits and poultry near Lithia Springs.

It has been my lot to draw mostly poor people,—wage-workers and tenants,—with few owners of their own homes, into church membership. Free thinkers or agnostics, who could not honestly assent to the creeds of the popular churches, have occasionally been drawn into our fellowship. No wealthy persons and none who have sought first for fashionable society and soft seats have identified themselves with my congregations, although a goodly number of my people have become influential and noted as teachers, editors and reformers. But while there is a membership of several hundred scattered over this and other states, the number in the immediate vicinity is small.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Dr. Wm. G. Eliot, of the Church of the Messiah and Chancellor of Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., was my wise and fatherly adviser in mission work for years before he was translated. I remember once going to him disheartened, and almost persuaded to abandon the mission. The support had fallen off and my congregations grown small, as they have often done, and then grown up again. I asked him what I should do. "Are you sure," inquired the Chancellor, "that you are pleading for the highest character and purest standard of public morals?" I replied: "I have been trying my best to do that and it seems that has caused several people to turn away from me!" "Very well, then," said the Chancellor, "stick, and don't worry! Be of good courage! The Unitarian mission stands for character and the best quality of work rather than for quantity or a great following. Only do your part well, and leave results to God. I will help you all I can."

One of the oldest and most trusted citizens of central Illinois, distinguished in his profession and a member of one of the oldest churches, recently volunteered to testify substantially as follows:

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

“ If Jasper Douthit had just preached the gospel and not made such a crusade against liquor license and other social evils, but instead had done more proselyting and persuaded people to join the Unitarian Church, he might have had a strong, self-supporting congregation in Shelbyville. However, I incline to believe the course he has pursued had done more good to everybody among all the churches and parties. His work has been leavening the whole community, killing religious bigotry and partisan prejudice, and has been most effective for moral reform.”

XIII

One Sunday morning about the year 1865, at the close of a little meeting in Dole's Hall, Mattoon, a young man introduced himself to me as Lyman Clark. He had come on horseback from twelve miles south to hear me preach. He told me he was thinking seriously of the ministry, and inquired about the Meadville Theological School. He had served valiantly, as I afterwards learned, in the Union army. He went four years to Meadville and graduated in 1869. He had parishes at Jacksonville, Ill., Lancaster, N. H., Petersham, Mass., Ayer, Mass., and at Andover, N. H., and served these different parishes for twenty-five years. During his pastorate at Petersham he rendered valuable service as member of the State Legislature. Two of his sons are graduates of Harvard University, and one of them, Rev. Albert W. Clark, is a most worthy young minister and present pastor of the Unitarian Church at Schenectady, N. Y.

James Brown, of Mode, Shelby County, was

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ordained March 11, 1877, in the Unitarian Church at Shelbyville at the hands of the late Brooke Herford of England, John H. Heywood of Louisville, Ky., and other ministers. Mr. Brown served the little flocks at Mode for nearly a score of years, and preached in the country school-houses round about, meanwhile supporting himself and family by hard work at wagon-making. He died March 31, 1902, at the age of 58 years.

Rev. Napoleon Hoagland, now minister at Tyngsboro, Mass., came, when a small boy, to hear me preach at the school-house near Mode, before the Union church was built. He was the picture then, in my mind, of Whittier's "Bare-foot Boy," — and bareheaded also, — but a good boy. He studied with me and my wife at our home, and then entered the Meadville School; graduating after four years, in 1885. He has served parishes at Greeley, Colo.; Wichita, Kansas; Olympia, Washington; Providence, R. I.; Marshfield, Mendon and Warwick, Mass. He has ever been a constant friend and helper of the mission around his birthplace. His mother was a devout and noble woman, and my schoolmate at Shelby Academy, over fifty years ago.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Rev. Ada H. Kepley, of Effingham, Illinois, was ordained in the Unitarian Church at Shelbyville, on July 24, 1892. Rev. W. H. Lloyd of the Presbyterian church, Shelbyville; Rev. T. B. Forbush and Rev. John H. Heywood took part in the services. Mrs. Kepley had been a member of the Unitarian church for many years. She had been a most active and self-sacrificing worker in the temperance and social purity reforms in her home county and throughout the state. She was before, as since her ordination, practically a minister at large in Effingham and adjoining counties. She edited and published, at a sacrifice, the *Friend of Home* for many years. It was one of the brightest and best temperance monthlies in the country. She was a close co-worker with the saintly Frances E. Willard and received high praise from Miss Willard for specially heroic service. Sister Kepley has most unselfishly served others all these years "without pay and without price."

Her husband, the late Henry B. Kepley, Esq., President of the Board of Trustees of Austin College, was in full sympathy with Mrs. Kepley's work. He too was a member of the Unitarian congregation of Shelbyville. He built at his own expense a chapel in the heart of the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

city of Effingham, which was called "The Temple." It was for Mrs. Kepley's use and dedicated to mission Sunday-school and gospel temperance purposes.

Rev. Ollie Cable Green is a teacher in the public schools at Winchester, Ill., and also public librarian. She united with the Unitarian Church, Shelbyville, in 1885. She was ordained by the United Brethren Church before she became a member of my congregation. She was a valuable assistant to me for several years in this mission. She has taught in the primary department of the public schools of Illinois for a score of years. She has made a heroic effort to rear and educate a family of useful children, one of whom is named after James Freeman Clarke. During part of her career as a teacher she has supplied the pulpit for the Universalists and some other denominations in the places where she has taught. While true to her colors as a Unitarian, she is in no sense a controversialist, but is deeply religious and is frequently welcomed to preach in orthodox pulpits.

My son, Robert Collyer Douthit, began mission work with his father as a printer boy, and served as a foreman in *Our Best Words* office when the paper had the largest circulation.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Ten thousand copies of one issue were circulated over this and adjacent counties during the fight against the saloon politics and the treating custom. During these years, we also published "Old Shelby Seminary Memorial" and other books. But the printer boy felt called to the ministry. He took a four years' course in Meadville Theological School, graduating in 1893. After graduating, he served acceptably the Unitarian parishes in Baraboo, Wis., and Petersham, Mass. Then, for about two years, he had charge of the congregations in this mission, meantime also assisting at Lithia Springs Chautauqua, besides editing and printing *Our Best Words*. Then for health's sake he returned East and was minister of the church at Dover, Mass., for nearly three years. He is now pastor of the first parish in Castine, Maine.

There is also Colonel Sobieski, now of Los Angeles, California, a descendant of the famous King John Sobieski of Poland. Colonel Sobieski has been a member of the Shelbyville Church for twelve years, and though not formally ordained, yet since his connection with the Unitarian church he has been essentially a Christian minister, "after the order of Melchisedek,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

King of Salem." When this (at that time) young Polish prince was shot through the body and lay bleeding on the battle-field of Gettysburg, he was pronounced mortally wounded by the surgeon, whereupon the chaplain advised him to make his peace with God. Colonel Sobieski replied quickly in broken English: "I have never had any fuss with God." All who knew Colonel Sobieski intimately would say he spoke the truth. He has been a loving disciple of the "Prince of Peace" all his life. He has traveled extensively pleading for temperance reform and has spoken oftener and in more states for goodwill to man than any other living American. He is still at it. He ministers at funerals and is often called to occupy on Sundays the pulpits of different churches. He always speaks out bravely, but most kindly and wisely, for "pure religion and perfect liberty," and the people hear him gladly. Though unlettered in a sense, never having gone to school a day in his life, yet, in the best sense he is broadly cultured and charms with his pleasing manners, his eloquence and, most of all, his Christian spirit. He is a missionary for whom we all thank God, while we pray for more of the same kind. He was for many of the early years, the platform manager

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

at Lithia Springs Chautauqua, and to his very unselfish service and wise counsel must be credited much of the real success of that enterprise.

My relations with orthodox ministers have been from the first remarkably friendly, considering how frankly I have dissented from the creeds of the churches. The first pastor of a Shelbyville church to propose a pulpit exchange with me was the pastor of the Second M. E. Church, Rev. James M. West, late of Bloomington, Ill. The late Rev. James L. Crane, General Grant's close friend and chaplain in the Civil War, father of Drs. Frank Crane, of Worcester, Mass., and the late Charles Crane, of Boston, Mass., was one of the first Methodists I ever heard preach. He was pastor of the First Methodist church in the early years of my ministry in Shelbyville. Through his influence I was chosen president of the Shelbyville Ministerial Union, the first club of the kind organized here, I believe, of which the pastors of all Protestant congregations in the city, excepting perhaps one, were members. A few years since, and a while before he was promoted, the Methodist veteran and saint, Isaac Groves, at the age of eighty years, came from his home

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in Urbana, Illinois, to visit me and preach in the pulpit of the "singular sheep" he baptised over two score years before.

About the first local pastor to subscribe and insist on paying for *Our Best Words*, was a Catholic priest, and some of my best friends and helpers have been members of that church. In the early years of my anti-slavery work, the United Brethren were most loyal allies, as the Free Methodist brethren have been in my later crusade against the liquor traffic and kindred evils. The Christian Church in Shelbyville was often granted me for religious services more than twenty-five years ago, when many homes of worship in the county were closed against me. The late Elder Bushrod W. Henry was pastor of that congregation for several years. He performed the marriage ceremony for my parents, and always seemed glad to favor their son.

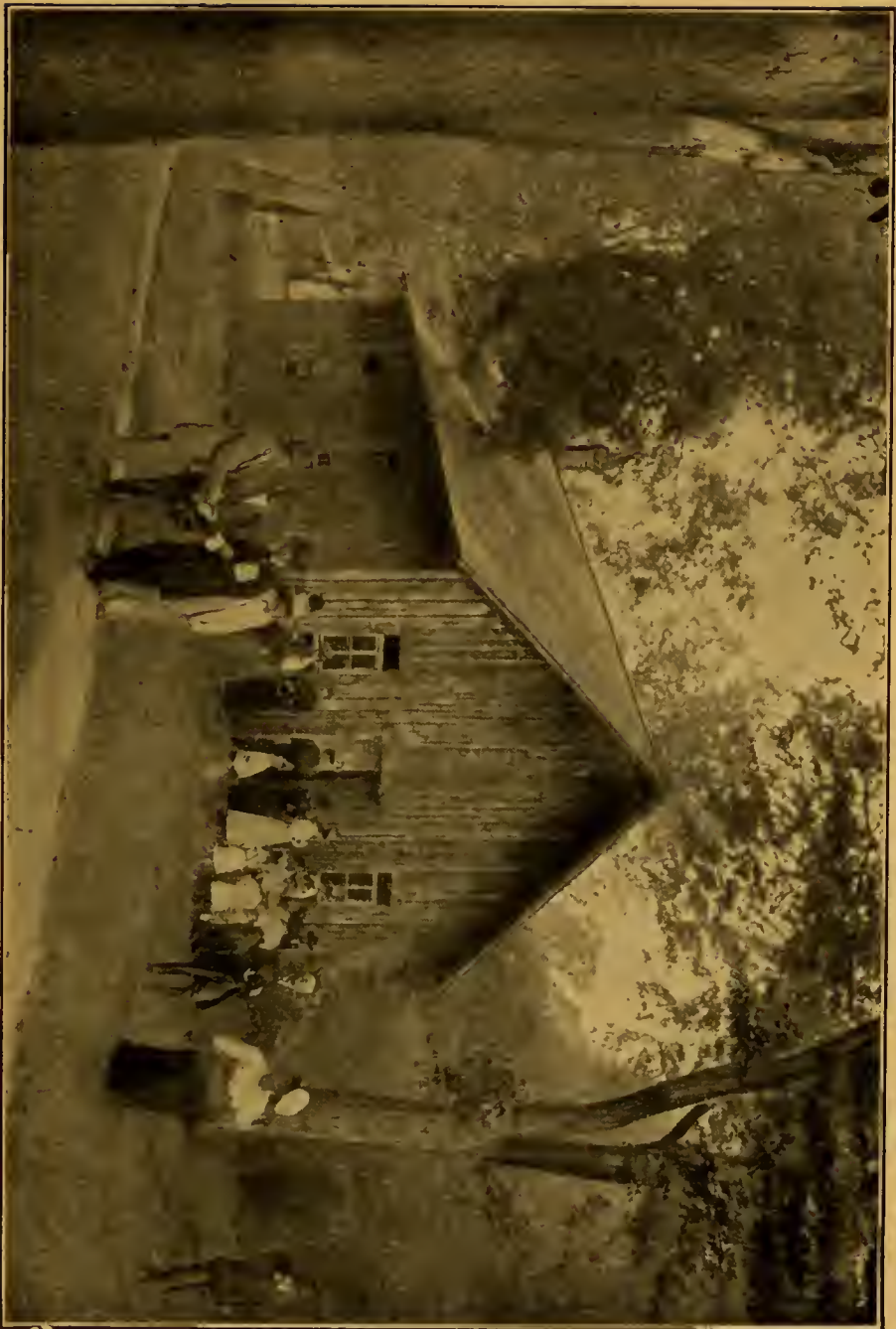
However, occasionally, I have been furiously preached and prayed against. Once in a large meeting, years ago, a minister so loudly cursed me in his prayer that he was not wanted afterwards by a majority of his parishioners. Sometimes ministers have, for lack of information, so misrepresented the Unitarian position that I have

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

felt obliged to correct them publicly. Such was the case when the late good Bishop Edward Edwards, of the United Brethren Church, came to this mission and unwittingly misrepresented Unitarians. I was present, took notes and publicly replied to his criticisms. I had a large hearing and was invited to repeat my reply again and again. Then, by the help of Robert Collyer and his people of the Unity Church, Chicago, my discourse was published and given a circulation of many thousand copies. I afterwards had the pleasure, through the kindness of Professor Huidekoper of Meadville, Pa., of placing in the hands of the bishop the works of Channing and other representative Unitarians. He thankfully received and promised to read them, and I trust was better informed.

At another time the newly installed pastor of a local church, an honest and zealous minister, felt it his duty to have no fellowship with the Unitarian missionary, and he said so kindly in public. I admired his loyalty to conviction and his brave stand against public evils. I cultivated his acquaintance, but he was shy of me. He would not attend meetings over which I presided, until a temperance rally was arranged to meet in the Unitarian church with Governor John

P. St. John of Kansas as the speaker. Nearly all the ministers of the city were present, including this brother. He had said he could not call a Unitarian minister a "brother in Christ." Governor St. John's speech against the liquor evil proved a baptism of the Holy Spirit to most of us in that meeting. We were made one in purpose for the overthrow of the evil. I shall never forget how the minister who had been so shy of me, now reached across the seats to clasp my hand and say, "Brother Douthit, let's hold the next meeting in a larger church." It was the first time he had addressed me so fraternally. Not long after that we were in the post-office together, when I received a letter with a horrid picture of a skull and cross-bones, threatening my life. "Will you let me have that to keep over Sunday?" asked this brother. I cheerfully granted the request. In his sermon the next Sunday to a full house, including prominent saloon politicians, this minister held up before his congregation the picture of skull and cross-bones and read the threat, and then gave a most rousing sermon against the corrupt politics that would resort to such a method of argument. That good minister proved to be one of my best friends and pluckiest co-workers



LIBRARY CHAPEL, LITHIA SPRINGS
Dedicated Aug. 22, 1904

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

for temperance and social purity. He tenderly assisted me at my father's funeral. He is now one of the ablest and most loved ministers of his denomination and a prominent Chautauqua worker.

From the beginning of our meetings at Lithia Springs the pastors of the various churches of Shelbyville and vicinity, both Catholic and Protestant, have, to the best of my recollection, been constant, brotherly and prayerful co-workers with scarcely any exception.

I was joined in the first basket-meeting at Lithia Springs in 1884 by two ministers in this vicinity with whom I had recently had some extended controversy on points of doctrine through the local press. For this reason it was a matter of surprise and comment on the part of many people that this Elder and this Doctor should be the first persons to unite with the Unitarian minister in holding field meetings at Lithia Springs. But why should this be considered a strange thing? Cannot disciples of the same Master honestly differ and give reasons for their differences on some points, and yet be good friends and strong allies in preaching a common Christianity and resisting a common evil?

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

There is a beautiful tradition about such springs as these at Lithia, and others in southern Indiana and Illinois. The tradition is this: "When the Indians were at war with each other, no matter how fiercely the battle raged, they agreed that these springs should be neutral ground, and that whenever any of the warring tribes met here they should at least smoke the pipe of peace while they remained around the springs."

XIV

The closing part of this story I devote to Lithia Springs and the institution I have tried to found there.

The Lithia Springs are about one mile and a half from where Log Church was, in an out-of-the-way place, no public road going nearer than a mile at the time of my early mission work at Log Church, and for many years after. Now roads are laid out on all sides, and the Big Four railroad station at Middlesworth, is only a mile distant. Twenty years ago the estate, a rolling country of hills and glens and creek bottom lands, was covered with forest. It lay for three-fourths of a mile on each side of "Lick Branch," now called "Lithia Creek." This is a water course of rapid fall, so that in sudden freshets it becomes a rushing torrent, but quickly subsides within a few hours so that it can be safely crossed on foot. This estate fell to me by inheritance from my father in 1889. There was no fence enclosing it, and years ago wild deer, and later all sorts of

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

domestic animals came to drink at the springs until they became a pond of mud. By and by one of the springs was protected by an old barrel with the bottom knocked out, and from this the people for miles around procured water to carry to their homes to drink. The springs came to be regarded as a necessity to the neighborhood for many miles about, in seasons of drouth, both for water for stock and for domestic use, and they were never known to fail in the dryest time. During a drouth many wagons would often be lined up waiting their turn. Hidden away in the forest and with few homes near, it was a long time before the place was much known outside of the neighborhood. But gradually the beauties of the spot and the healthfulness of the water began to acquire more than a local fame, and by 1885, or thereabouts, it had become a popular camping and picnic resort. Then Satan got busy, and the sober and orderly were often kept away by those who congregated there, especially on Sundays, to drink and carouse, with no policeman to molest or make afraid.

It had been my custom in the summer time all the years I lived in Shelbyville to speak frequently at basket meetings, as the all-day

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

picnics with social and religious services were called. Some of these were annual occasions in which people of all the different religious bodies in the vicinity united. I came to have more calls to address these picnics and basket meetings than I could accept. I saw that Lithia Springs would be an ideal place for such gatherings.

With the co-operation of Elder L. M. Linn, a rough and plucky hater of the saloon, and others of the Christian Church, a basket meeting was held there on Sunday, August 31, 1884. Christians of all denominations joined heartily in the services. Two thousand people were reported to be present. In the afternoon a temperance service which I had prepared and printed was used, and hosts of people bore testimony in behalf of temperance by spirited singing while the congregation filed by the ministers in charge and clasped hands in token of their desire and purpose to pull together in resisting the Devil and building up the Kingdom of God. Then other meetings were held. On Sunday, August 9, 1885, Rev. J. T. Sunderland, then Secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, preached there in the morning and assisted in interesting services for the children

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

in the afternoon. At these meetings there were only old logs and the grass about the springs for seats and the blue sky for canopy.

In November, 1889, soon after the death of my father, I was given possession of part of that tract of land, the first land I ever owned. I say a "part" of that tract, because I bought 100 acres more which has greatly advanced in value. I was not expecting to inherit any real estate, and I had made up my mind to be content without it. In fact, I rather enjoyed singing, or trying to sing, as I rode on horseback, or walked to my appointments, those verses of the pioneer Methodist preacher:

"No foot of land do I possess,
Nor cottage in the wilderness."

When the partitioners of the estate set apart this Lithia Springs ground to my share, I was grateful in a sense, yet, in another sense, I was a little unhappy that I could not now honestly sing the old song.

My father had owned the springs from the time the Indians left. They had very precious associations for me. The land was that over which my mother had carried me as she gathered the sap from the maple trees around them

to make the yearly supply of sweets for the family table; and now I craved to live long enough to see it consecrated forever as holy ground, made too pure to ever tolerate in any form that which had caused my mother so much distress, destroyed so many homes, and blasted the lives of so many of my neighbors and relatives.

There was no income to be derived from the grounds, which were wild, unfenced, uncultivated. The neighbors only thought of them as a fine farm in the rough, and especially valuable for stock because of the rare water supply, but I only thought of how I might consecrate the ground to the mission of my life. It seemed to me that here was an opportunity to establish some form of work or beneficent institution that would become a permanent rallying center for practical religion. What form it might take I did not know. I must make the venture walking by faith and not by sight. I must make the start alone and without even the approval of prudent business men.

The first thing to be done was to prepare the place to hold meetings. I was moneyless and with insufficient salary for even living expenses. I had not ten dollars capital to begin

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

with. Therefore I borrowed on the land as security enough money to fence it, clear a part of the dense underbrush around the springs, build a shelter over the springs and wall with tile. By the middle of the summer of 1890, with the help of generous neighbors, we had completed a large covered shed or wigwam with open sides, later called the "tabernacle" or auditorium, to hold meetings in.

I determined that our nation's birthday should be kept in one place in Shelby County at a safe distance from those plague spots, the saloons. Therefore, to begin with, I invited everybody to a free Fourth of July picnic at Lithia Springs, and there was a mighty response. The papers reported ten thousand people present. The woods were full of people, and many pretty trees were spoiled by the horses.

There was still a mountain of prejudice and long prevailing custom to overcome. Old residents of the vicinity contended that the springs must not be fenced from the public. It was claimed that they must remain forever as free as the air to everybody. The only road to them ran diagonally across the land, as it had run, for aught I know, since the Indians made the

trail; and, strange to say, a majority of the township commissioners encouraged by public sentiment insisted that it must continue to go that way instead of on the section line. They claimed that for the convenience of the public the road must run so as to include the springs; that the owner of the land had no right to enclose and control that water. It should be free to all people at all times as it always had been,—and certainly no temperance crank should be allowed to control it. That would interfere with “personal liberty.” The case actually went to the courts. Finally the Shelby County Board of Supervisors,—the county legislature,—appointed three of its members as a jury, or court, before which the case should be tried. The court was convened, seated on old logs about the springs. Many people were present. Hon. Geo. D. Chafee, now senator, my most faithful friend from the beginning, was attorney for the owner of the land, and Col. L. B. Stephenson, then of St. Louis, for the road commissioners. After much testimony and eloquent pleading, the verdict was that the springs might be enclosed and the road changed to the section line.

The first ten days' encampment was held in August, 1891, and was conducted mostly by

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

workers for temperance and kindred reforms as advocated by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Miss Frances E. Willard, was to me and my wife the patron saint of this mission for nearly thirty years. She seemed to have a special interest in *Our Best Words* and the mission work since the first and only time she visited Shelbyville, near the beginning of her wonderful career. It so happened at that visit that I was the only minister to be on the platform with her and assist in the meeting by prayer. I remember how she hastened to clasp my hand at the close of her address and say: "Well, I am so thankful to have had the presence and prayer of at least one minister at this meeting." There was a trembling and pathos in her voice as she spoke that I shall never forget.

From that time until she was promoted, saying: "How beautiful it is to be with God," she wrote me often, and I never had such a prompt correspondent with any busy person, unless it was Dr. Henry W. Bellows of All Souls Church, New York. I am moved to give place here to one of her letters. From her home in Evanston in 1894, she wrote:

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

"Dear Brother,—

"I have your unique paper, and I can but feel that if every paper in this country were at the same high level we would be on the high road to the millenium. You know that I am in the heartiest sympathy with you in all your great and beautiful work. All women owe you their thanks. We are in a great battle wherever we may be, and I think you feel as I do, that those who care for the same things and do the same work are really always in the same world of thought and growth.

"And believe me always,

"Yours with sisterly regard,

"FRANCES E. WILLARD."

About half a dozen families tented on the grounds at the first Assembly while we held meetings day and evening for the ten days; and the number of tenters steadily increased from year to year until there were a thousand or more.

It is the testimony of many of wide observation that the place is ideal for camping and Chautauqua purposes. The breezes are always cooler and more constant here in summer than on the prairie, the scenery is beautiful, the soil dry, sandy and well drained, with no mud a few

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

hours after the heaviest rain. It is healthful, almost free from mosquitoes, and far away from the vicious influences of the city, the bustle of trade and the fashionable "resorts," just the place where whole families may gather, in love of nature and truth, and dwell in sweet simplicity to learn from the wisest and best men and women of earth lessons of health, virtue and happiness. The water is equal to any in the country for medicinal and health-giving qualities, and of just the right temperature to drink.

Nearly if not quite every plant, tree and flower that grows in the Mississippi valley may be found about these springs; and Prof. Leander S. Keyser, the popular author on ornithology, who spent a week on the grounds, says there are probably two hundred varieties of birds here during the year. During the last eighteen years they have been specially protected and undisturbed on the grounds, so that they have increased in number and grown remarkably tame.

Many have said in substance what Booker T. Washington wrote: "I have visited few spots anywhere in the world that possess such charms, such an influence for good in every direction as is true of Lithia Springs." And

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Commander Ballington Booth testified: "I have seen some beautiful assembly grounds. But I must say that I have yet to see a place that is more picturesque and seems more fitted by nature for the purpose to which this spot has been consecrated."

As before stated, beginning with 1891, annual ten-day assemblies were held. These first assemblies were of the old-fashioned camp-meeting order. The time of the encampment was later increased to fifteen days, and, at the suggestion of Chaplain C. C. McCabe, afterwards Bishop, who came to help several times, I planned to have the institution become a part of the great Chautauqua system, a real national Chautauqua, and one that should be a credit to the Unitarian mission and name. But this meant more expense for schools, lectures, and a high class of entertainments. It meant more buildings. It meant more systematic school work, especially for the young, combined with recreation.

In a circular letter dated November 10, 1898, to the friends of the mission in the Unitarian body, my wife and I offered to take less than half price for the estate if ten thousand dollars could be raised for it at once, saying that we hoped the enterprise, conducted as it had been,

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

might become self-supporting. Thereupon Dr. Edward Everett Hale made an enthusiastic appeal through the *Christian Register*, recommending that the offer be accepted; but a year passed, and there was surprisingly little response to the appeal.

At the annual Lithia Assembly in August, 1899, the party Prohibitionists in council on the ground made a move to purchase one hundred acres at my price, one hundred dollars per acre. This movement of the Prohibitionists was led by the Hon. Hale Johnson, now of sainted memory, the noble and beloved candidate for Vice President, who was shot dead by an insane man when he was trying to befriend him.

I was on the point of completing the bargain with Mr. Johnson when my wife and I were advised by Ballington Booth and other friends that, as we wished so much to keep the Chautauqua under the auspices of the denomination with which we had labored so long, there should be another effort to that end. Hon. George E. Adams, of Chicago, Vice President of the American Unitarian Association, was in camp at the time. My wife and I conferred with him, and he assured us that he would favor bringing the matter of raising a Lithia Springs fund be-

fore the next National Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches, which was to meet in Washington, D. C., October, 1899.

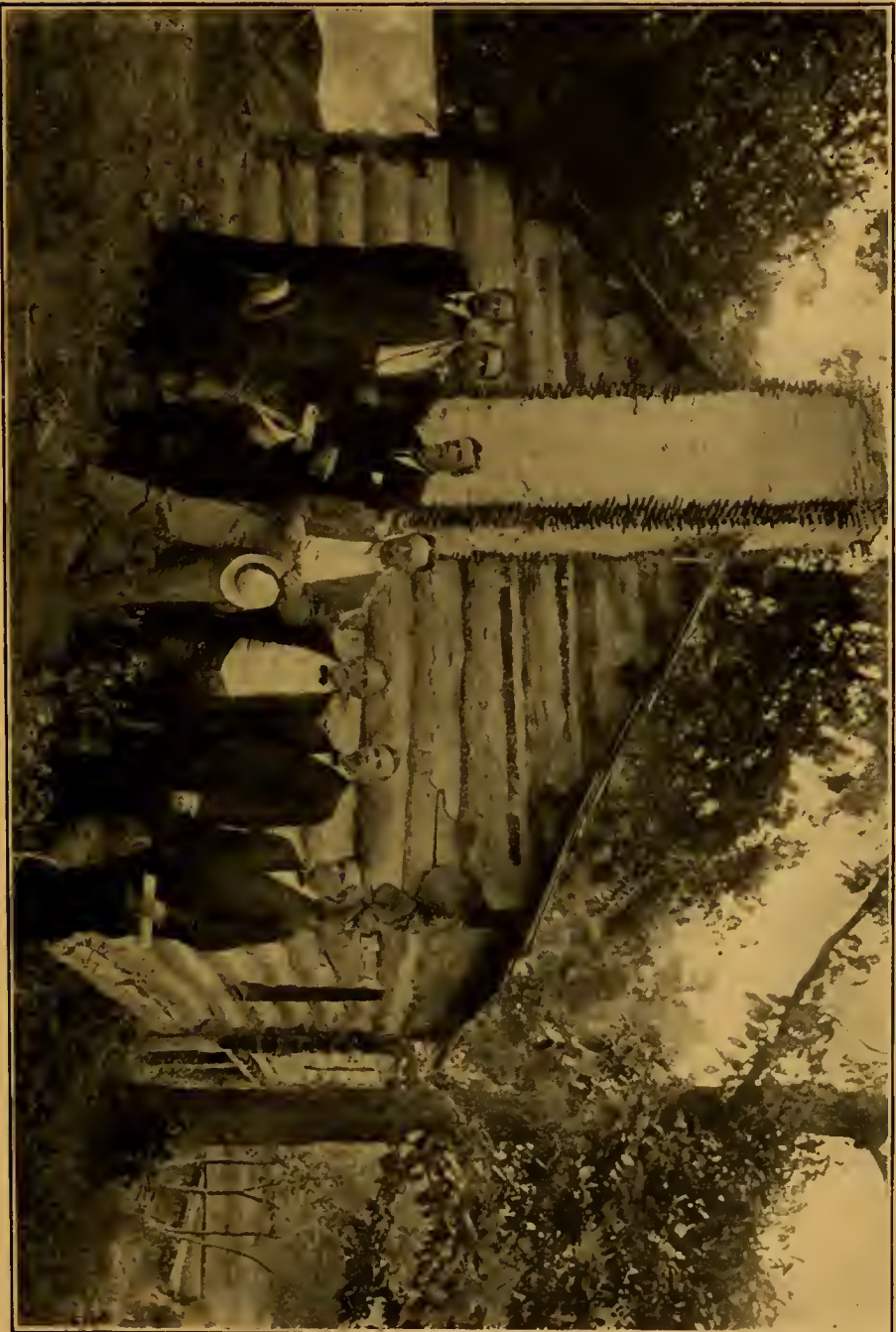
We decided to act upon Mr. Adams's suggestion. Accordingly at the meeting in Washington by motion of Mr. Hale, seconded by Mr. Adams and others, the movement to raise a fund for Lithia Springs was endorsed by the Conference at Washington, the late Hon. George F. Hoar, United States Senator from Massachusetts, presiding. I then and there proposed that if eight thousand dollars, estimated to be half the value of two hundred acres, could be raised immediately we would give a deed for two hundred acres to the American Unitarian Association. Dr. Hale and others favored the raising of the sum right in that Conference, but the business was placed in the hands of a committee. It was my understanding that the committee would convene immediately and submit a plan for raising the eight thousand dollars by the close of the Conference. Therefore, though urgent duties called me home, I remained in the city two days and nights longer expecting the sum to be subscribed. Imagine my chagrin when nothing was done.

Finally, through the co-operation of the

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

Women's National Alliance and the energetic push of Rev. Charles E. St. John, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, who visited the Chautauqua in 1900, a fund of eight thousand dollars was completed, and in April, two years after the Conference at Washington, a deed was given by my wife and myself to the American Unitarian Association for two hundred acres of Lithia Springs ground, with special contract and lease for the purpose of continuing the Chautauqua work.

It will be noticed that instead of ten thousand dollars for two hundred and sixty acres, eight thousand dollars was raised for two hundred acres. During the three years of uncertainty, with seven per cent. interest to pay and the increasing necessity of keeping up a high standard for the Assembly, thus holding the vantage already gained, my debts had increased so that there was a balance of forty-two hundred dollars unpaid. And now, largely in consequence of these uncertainties and delays in raising the fund, my worst fears were realized by the announcement that a rival Assembly was incorporated to be held at the old Fair Grounds, by some money loaners and church members not in sympathy with my religious views or my fight



LINCOLN LOG CABIN, LITHIA SPRINGS, AUGUST, 1906

D. W. Howell, T. P. Byrnes, J. L. Douthitt, J. G. Woolley, W. W. M. Barber, G. M. Brown, W. M. Bachus

against the drink evil. The saloon keepers were elated. The promoters of the new enterprise had practically unlimited capital, and they prepared to spend it freely. An auditorium costing some eight thousand dollars was built, the grounds were improved and beautified with an artificial lake, and they have yearly engaged some of the costliest talent in the nation and some good preachers and lecturers, many of whom are not aware of what they do. The promoters were men who knew nothing of the real Chautauqua movement. They thought I had been making money and that rivalry was just as legitimate in this as in other enterprises. Thus, while those true to Chautauqua principles, at home and abroad, have given us sympathy and help in our struggle, the press in this section being outspoken in regard to the "mean trick" in opposition to Lithia, yet great numbers went to see the crowd and the show at the Fair Grounds. Thus the future of Lithia Chautauqua was clouded. I doubt not that in various ways the opposition has cost us thousands of dollars.

In the face of the depressing financial prospect in 1901, when kind contributors thought the outlook bright and many friends thought

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

the whole matter settled satisfactorily, I was menaced by this wealthy and unscrupulous rivalry. Thus it will be seen why, when the time came for dedication of the grounds in August, 1901, my heart failed me. I advised with Rev. Henry H. Barber, who was with us, and he said: "Go on, I'll help you all I can." And so he did. I again took counsel of my hopes and not of my fears; and the dedication took place, seemingly with flying colors, Sunday, August 25, 1901. But while the people rejoiced, I wept in my tent. The principal address was made by Mrs. Laura Ormiston Chant of England, and pastors of the local churches were invited and took part in the exercises, besides many prominent helpers on the grounds.

Chaplain, afterwards Bishop, McCabe spoke for us at one of the earlier Fourth of July celebrations. He was not a party prohibitionist, but as soon as he saw what I was trying to do he said, "Brother Douthit, I want to help you," and he returned to me a large part of the first money I paid him for his very acceptable services. "Why not start a Chautauqua here?" he said to me, "and let it be an inter-denominational and inter-partisan assembly?" "It is just what I have prayed for

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

these many years," I responded enthusiastically. "Give me your hand on that, and by the help of God it shall be." And so I added "Inter-denominational and Inter-partisan," to my watchwords as the gift of Chaplain McCabe, and he helped to bring his suggestions to pass, serving at the assemblies several times. But to be true to these principles at the beginning required a struggle and loss of patronage. For instance, the first time our Catholic brethren were given the program for a day, many non-Catholics stayed away from the grounds and some people sulked in their tents. "It will ruin the Assembly to let in Catholics or colored people," was the cry. "Well then, it must be ruined," was the manager's reply. Nevertheless the number of campers increased. At some assemblies of late years there has been an average attendance of fifteen hundred people daily; and it is the uniform testimony that there were never before in that part of Illinois so large a proportion of intelligent, kindly disposed, and well-bred men and women of all sects, Catholic and Protestant, all parties, classes, and of different races, brought together for such a length of time and with such harmony of spirit and purpose.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

They came from eight or ten of the surrounding states on railroads; and they came in wagons, some from fifty and a hundred miles. At our annual assemblies people of all sects and races and from all sections have been welcomed to its privileges. On these grounds Jew and Gentile, Unitarian, Universalist and Catholic are treated with courtesy and good fellowship by people of orthodox churches. They attend the same classes. Many of them eat at the same table. They sing and pray together; they take counsel together and dwell in unity and peace with none to molest or make afraid. Thus the fellowship I had craved for a lifetime had come to pass on the holiest ground, to me, on earth.

When the good name Chautauqua was being perverted for commercial purposes, Chancellor John H. Vincent and other leading workers for the true Chautauqua called a meeting in St. Louis in the fall of 1899 and organized the International Chautauqua Alliance, in order to prevent, so far as possible, fake enterprises under the name. The officers of this Alliance then chosen were men of different religious bodies, and for many years I was honored with the office of recording secretary, and later, for two years, with that of corresponding secretary.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

I want to record the fact, that I never in my life associated with a nobler, more unselfish and brotherly body of men, on the whole, than were the members of this International Alliance. I was never treated more cordially by any body of people, religious or otherwise, though for most of the years of its existence I have been the only Unitarian Chautauqua manager in the Alliance. Furthermore, I want to say that but for the quick sympathy and prompt and tactful co-operation of the members of this Alliance, represented by Bishop Vincent and his son Dr. George E. Vincent of the University of Chicago, Lithia Springs Chautauqua, with its very limited resources, being without any endowment or capital, could not have survived to this day and won, against the wealthy local opposition, the high credit and prestige it now has among good people and the real Chautauqua workers of the world.

The greatest strain of all my life was during the years 1901 to 1905, years which were the last my dear wife was to be with me on earth. She was an invalid now and needed my constant care; I must nurse and support her with one hand and with the other keep driving at work as hard as I could to save the cause from defeat.

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

This cause was the inspiring thought of the close of the many years of our life together; and she faithfully, sweetly, cheered me on to the last. It was in the early days of the Assembly of 1905, August 1, at our cottage at Lithia Springs, that she left all she loved here in the fond trust, as I fully believe, that our hopes would triumph, and that all our labor, trials and sacrifices had not been for naught. Forty-eight years together, and nearly all the time actively engaged in *our* mission work. I emphasize and dwell lovingly on "*our*."

How I got through the trials, uncertainties and perplexities of continuing the work I hardly know. It was much more of an uncertain struggle than the first period, because I had taken a great responsibility, much was expected of me, and I shrank from presenting the facts of the case to those who believed that in contributing to the eight thousand dollar fund they had done all that was asked and all that was needed. But somehow the high credit of the Chautauqua was sustained and necessary improvements of great utility were added to the grounds.

In 1905 I felt that I ought not to carry the load of uncertainty, perplexity and debt any

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

longer; forty-two hundred dollars in mortgages had remained since 1901 and had been increased by seven per cent. interest, and other expenses. But following a signed appeal by a score of friends of this mission in the Unitarian body, part of this sum was raised, to my great relief.

The Lithia Springs Chautauqua Association, a local, non-profit sharing corporation was organized to take the financial responsibility of the enterprise. The business management of this body was unfortunate, for which I do not feel at all to blame, as my advice was not regarded, though I had charge of the program as usual. But there was a notion that I was nothing but a preacher, and so the practical financial management was entrusted to others who were wholly inexperienced in Chautauqua business and who thought they knew how to make it boom. The result was that on November 8, 1907, this company relinquished the management, being in debt about twenty-five hundred dollars. Nevertheless, this well-meant effort resulted in some four thousand dollars voluntary donations by the people of this locality for improvements, besides keeping up the work for two years, and the local Association is under

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

obligations to pay its debts as soon as it can. This, in some measure, is a small token of the devotion of this people to Lithia Springs, and under discouraging circumstances at that; because this local organization somehow failed at the start to get the confidence of the people.

XV

What is Chautauqua? This cannot be answered in a sentence, nor on several pages. Chautauqua is in some respects what the people make it. It is, briefly stated, an educational institution at a summer resort home under some positive religious auspices, where people of all sects and no sect,—those with church homes and of no church home,—dwell together and unite to help bring the Kingdom of God into each other's hearts and homes, and learn to make the most of themselves and their opportunities, forgetting differences in the endeavor to uplift and enoble all work. It is a bit of heaven on earth, a foretaste of the millennium, where all dwell together in unity and singleness of purpose, a vacation, social, restful, recreative, instructive, all with the best moral and religious influences. Time is counted by the Chautauqua meeting and outing, and whole families, and whole neighborhoods even, look forward to it each year as little children do to Christmas, as a wholesome, social, happy, joyous, earnest and

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

instructive coming together. Think, then, what Chautauqua means to a hard-working community of farmers, for Lithia Springs is essentially a farmer's Chautauqua, and their families and others who badly need this vacation and change of work. Many who help in the schools and on the program make this their vacation time, giving their services. For instance, the orchestra that has served us so acceptably, has almost entirely given its services in this way for years, the members taking this as an outing time from regular employment. The employes and helpers on the grounds also join in the feeling of gladness and fraternity, young people and old, school-teachers and hired help in the farming communities, coming for miles to help in getting ready, many working in this way for season tickets for themselves and families. Several hundred tickets have thus been secured in one season.

Chautauqua is also a place where, by coming in touch with the great souls of earth, many are quickened to higher life. Chautauqua is religion with a practical emphasis, and liberty with a religious emphasis. Poor people and rich people will mingle at Chautauqua who hardly ever meet in church. Country men and towns' peo-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

ple,— people from various sections in this and other lands will meet on a common footing. In this way the gospel is preached to thousands whom the churches do not reach.

This whole effort at Lithia Springs has meant for me “more and better work for the Kingdom of God” with these two mottoes flung in the breeze: “No North, no South, no East, no West, but one grand Union, and one Flag.” “In the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus Christ we unite for the worship of God and the service of man.”

Booker T. Washington, the great mental and spiritual emancipator of his race, on the occasion of his last visit to us (1903) very kindly said:

“I am glad to return to Lithia Springs for the third time. I am always glad to come here. I am always glad to shake the hand of your leader. I have refused invitations to at least twenty-five Chautauquas this season, and this is the third and last one that I shall attend. I come to Lithia Springs because I believe in what you are doing and in the way you are doing it. Because you are strong for reality, simplicity, getting down to nature. I am glad to see your children get out where they can wade in the water, hear the songs of the birds

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

and live near nature. I was born in a log cabin, and I haven't felt so much at home for fifteen years as when Brother Douthit put me in that log cabin."

But this great educator and benefactor of his race and all races did not tell it all. He came to Lithia to help us when he could have received very much more money from others.

My fellow-townsmen and friend for over forty years, Senator George D. Chafee, at Library Chapel, October 15, 1904, gave this testimony:

"Here under the shadow of these trees, in this happy little valley, around these bubbling springs, in this rude structure,—tabernacle they call it,—where nothing has been done for show, during the last dozen years have been gathered annually the very best and brightest men and women the world has known, and their sweetest and brightest thoughts have been expressed for us who came to listen and learn.

"Here was absolute freedom; here was rest for the weary; here was hope for the sorrowful; here were pictures of a bright future; here reminiscent joys of the past.

"I don't believe there ever was another ten acres in the world where so many great and good men and women met and gave such free expres-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

sion to so many great and good thoughts in the same length of time. Religion, History, Romance, Right Living, Higher Aims, Education, Music, Good Fellowship,—everything, except the sordid aim to accumulate money, here has its highest and best.”

Several things mark this Chautauqua as unique, notably: (1) It is probably the only Chautauqua Assembly begun among farmers and in a rural district, miles from any village or city. (2) It was the first Chautauqua in the world, so far as I can learn, to invite and welcome our Roman Catholic friends to equal privileges on its platform and give them the making of the program for a day.—Also the colored people were given the program. (3) It is the only one, that I know of, which began as an anti-saloon crusade and encampment, but also gives each political party a day's program. (4) It is the only Chautauqua conducted under Unitarian auspices, and it should, therefore, be non-sectarian in spirit, principle and purpose, according to the traditions of the Chautauqua idea. (5) It was the first to give a day's program to the Congress of Religion. (6) It is the only Chautauqua on earth having a wealthy

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

opposition only five miles distant, organized for commercial purposes under the name Chautauqua.

Here has been virtually a parliament of religions; a church federation; a convention for fair play to all; a people's university; a kindergarten; a school for good citizenship and social purity; a school for Bible study; a school for domestic science, health and good behavior; a conference of men and women to cultivate the art of making happy homes and of making the most of life, the best of each other and of everything the good God gives us.

As the Lithia Springs Chautauqua has grown great changes have been wrought in the unfenced woodland around Lithia. A small part has been cleared of underbrush and set in bluegrass, having a beautiful park-like effect. A driveway of several miles over the park (laid out by Prof. J. C. Blair, of our state University, and in process of construction though not completed for lack of means), gives a varied view along cultivated fields, through a pleasant, beautifully shaded meadow, with high bluffs near the creek, up deep glens, and through forest so dense that most of the view is of the blue sky above. Roads have been

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

worked, fences made, washouts filled up, bridges and embankments built. Hundreds of stumps of once majestic trees must be rooted up with dynamite so as to put the park of forty acres around the springs in trim for cottages, log cabins and tents.

Early in the year 1902, the grounds were planned, nearly two hundred building lots platted, and arrangements made for leasing lots for a term of years, with restrictions giving the managers of the Chautauqua control as to proper use of the leased ground. Prices of leases were fixed at from ten to fifteen dollars per year, and several cottages were built the first season. There are now some twenty-five leased lots, with cottages varying from one hundred and fifty to eight hundred dollars or more in cost, post-office and headquarters building, grocery-store, dining-hall, kitchen and restaurant, five-room cottage for manager, and Kindergarten Hall, making a total investment of some seventy-five hundred dollars made by individuals.

On the American Unitarian Association grounds for the use of the Chautauqua are four two-room cottages, nine cabins and two dormitories of six and eight rooms each, all bringing

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

an income, where rented, of about two hundred and fifty dollars at each annual assembly. Then there is the rustic Library Chapel, with its circulating library of nearly one thousand volumes, and of great value as a place for holding meetings and classes. This was finished in 1904 by funds placed in our hands by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pickering of Boston. The dedication services were held Monday, August 22, 1904, Rev. Henry H. Barber preaching the sermon, and Rev. Fred V. Hawley making an address.

The recent remodeling of the tabernacle, ice house, dam for swimming and boating pool, miscellaneous buildings, feed-yard for horses, etc., raises the total value of improvements on the grounds, private and belonging to the Association, for Chautauqua and missionary purposes, to over twenty thousand dollars.

This, besides the necessary work of clearing, road-making, etc., which has resulted in no direct income, gives some idea of what has been accomplished in a material way, most of it in the face of the local opposition that has beset us since 1901. Besides the two hundred acres included I and members of my family hold ninety acres more, controlling it for Chautauqua purposes, thirty acres of which, bought by my son

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

and his wife, near the springs, had before been used as a harbor for evil-doers. All this should ultimately belong to the Chautauqua estate or be controlled in its interest.

Here I am at the end of my story. It has taken more of work and time than I supposed. Spring is here. I have been in Shelbyville all winter preaching on Sunday, and preparing for Chautauqua other days. I long for the bright days to come when I can spend more time amid the healthful influences of the springs. I preach regularly in Shelbyville during the winter season, and for the summer I hold services regularly in Library Chapel.

My son George lives near the springs and looks after the wants of the cottagers and other interests. He is postmaster of Lithia, which is a regular U. S. post-office for the summer season, and my grandson and namesake, Jasper, is chief clerk. My son and family also help with *Our Best Words*, the monthly wings of the mission since 1880. Crowds of cottagers and visitors, camping and picnic parties, etc., are coming and going all summer, and often in winter. We still hold Fourth of July celebrations; and the local Methodist churches last year inaugurated an annual basket

meeting, to be held in June, which promises to be very largely attended. All these services, with the Assembly in August, keep the vacation filled with interesting work.

I have dwelt at such length upon the work at Lithia Springs, because, as God gives me to see it, this is the most important visible result of this mission, and the nearest realization of my prayer through a half century, for good fellowship and co-operation among all people for righteousness, temperance, peace and good-will to men.

When, many years ago, Jenkin Lloyd Jones was Secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, he once visited this mission in the muddy season. In his report of the visit he said that the American Unitarian Association had aimed an arrow at the state capitol and it had glanced off and stuck in the mud down in "Egypt." I do not know exactly what Brother Jones meant by that remark, but it is suggestive. It has been claimed by some that Unitarian Christianity is not so much for the "great plain people,"—to use Lincoln's favorite phrase,—as for the highly cultured, and that missionary efforts should therefore be ex-

JASPER DOUTHIT'S STORY

erted chiefly among the "influential, intellectual and scholarly," and at college towns and universities. But the gospel I have felt called to preach for nearly fifty years is sent of God for all sorts, classes and conditions of people, especially the more needy and unfortunate of our Father's children. "In my early missionary work," said good Bishop Thoburn, "I made the mistake of fancying that if I could get hold of the influential part of the community, I could get hold of the masses. I found that this fancy was contrary to reason and history. *Christianity was founded by beginning at the bottom.*" I did not realize this fact at the beginning of my ministry, but I did feel that I must begin where I was born and work among the people with whom I was brought up.

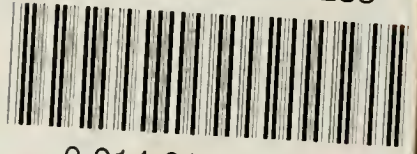
Here I have labored over forty-five years, mostly under the auspices of the American Unitarian Association, whose avowed object is "to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity." This has, indeed, been my desire and purpose since the time I began to worship and work with the First Methodist Church, Shelbyville, Illinois, in 1854, until now.

I have tried in these pages to give a simple, plain story of my life-experience, with the earnest prayer that it may help others to do more and better work than I have done for the Kingdom of God on earth.



DEC 7 1909

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 612 091 A

